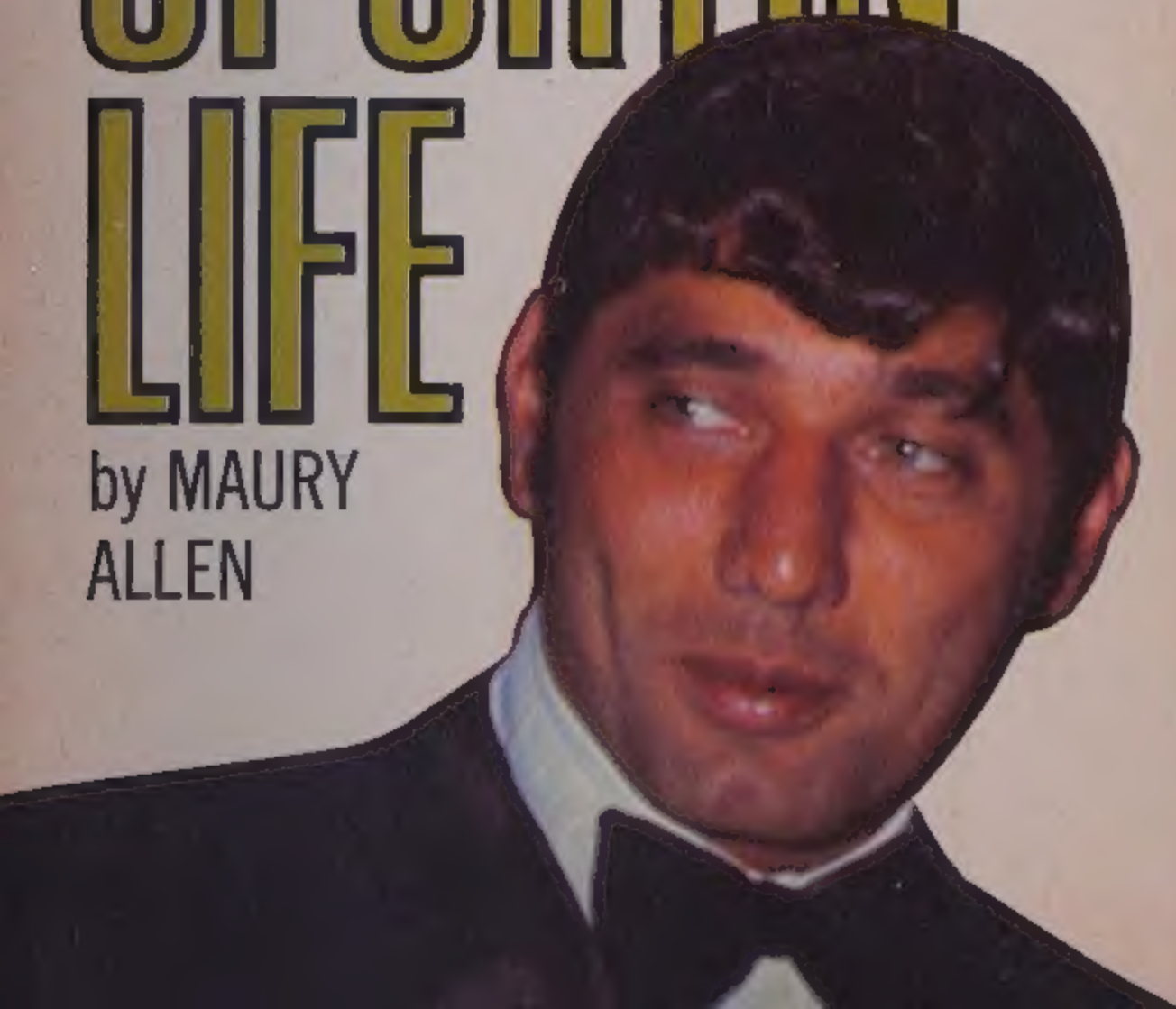


FULLY ILLUSTRATED

JOE NAMATH'S SPORTIN' LIFE

by MAURY
ALLEN

JETS HUDDLE
with Kyle Rote
and Coach Weeb Ewbank
Saturdays
WNBC-TV  4



JOE NAMATH'S SPORTIN' LIFE

by MAURY ALLEN

PAPERBACK LIBRARY

New York

PAPERBACK LIBRARY EDITION

First Printing: September, 1969

Copyright © 1969 by Coronet Communications, Inc.

For

Janet and Jennifer

Both Great

Photos by United Press International.

Cover photos by Oscar Abolafia, and Ken Regan—Studio 5.

Paperback Library is a division of Coronet Communications, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Paperback Library" accompanied by an open book, is registered in the United States Patent Office. *Coronet Communications, Inc., 315 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010.*

WE LOVE YOU, JOE

Two short-order cooks stared out of the kitchen window of their Cozy Corner restaurant on the sixth of June 1969, shortly before 9 o'clock in the morning. They watched closely the uncommon activity a few doors away. Cars, cops and pedestrians were beginning to jam up in front of a small lounge and restaurant called Bachelors III on New York's chic Lexington Avenue at Sixty-Second Street.

"There ain't no way Joe Namath gonna get up for no press conference at 9:30 in the morning," said the first man.

"Get up, hell; he ain't been to bed yet."

Everybody knew Joe Namath's scene. It was late, late at night or early, early in the morning. Morning meant 5 or 6. It never meant 9.

"Sure, Joe stays up late," Sonny Werblin once said. "He's young, single and good-looking. He doesn't have a job where he has to be at work at 9 o'clock. Should he stay home and read books?"

Nobody ever accused Namath of staying up late reading books. But he did do his homework. He studied his football play books. He had studied them so well he had led the underdog Jets to an astounding 16-7 win over the Baltimore Colts in pro football's Super Bowl. Namath was generally regarded as the finest quarterback in all football. He was twenty-five years old and king of the mountain.

Bachelors III is a one-story wooden building at 798 Lexington Avenue. It had a tan front with large green awnings. Two nineteenth century kerosene lamps hung from the sides. The building was surrounded by beauty and culture. A place called Palais Royal Coiffures was next door on the right. The gorgeous mannequins with the bouffant wigs supplied the beauty. Culture rubbed off from a French bookstore with a large sign that read

LIBRAIRIE LIPTON. A small sign underneath explained it all for the patrons of Bachelors III. The sign said: French bookstore.

Three doors down from Bachelors III was a fashionable East Side Manhattan Boutique. It was called The Different Drummer. Joe Namath had no connection with it. He easily could have. No football player, no sports personality, almost no person in the American landscape of the 1960s, had ever been such a different drummer. Namath made his own music. Only he marched to it.

Out-of-town reporters began to collect outside Bachelors III. They had been at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan attending the annual meeting of the football leagues. The big question had been the alignment for pro football's merger.

Now Namath was the big question.

Charles Maher of the *Los Angeles Times* and Pete Waldmeir of the *Detroit News* walked up to the unimpressive building.

"Is this what the fuss is all about?" asked Waldmeir.

"Maybe Namath got us all up early to sell it to us," Maher said.

Namath had actually gotten the press up early to explain his case. Several days before, he had been called into the office of the commissioner of football, Pete Rozelle. The commissioner had ordered Namath to give up his one-third ownership in Bachelors III. Rozelle said bookmakers and other undesirable elements were frequenting the place. Rozelle gave Namath an ultimatum. Sell his share of Bachelors III or face suspension.

Namath had purchased the restaurant and lounge on November 11, 1968. His partners were Joe Dellapina, a gentle soft-spoken man who had worked as a manager under the former owner of the place when it was known as the Margin Call, and Ray Abruzzese. Abruzzese had been a teammate of Namath's at Alabama, had played with him on the Jets for a while, had been his roommate in his slick East Side apartment, and had been a bosom buddy for almost ten years.

In the short time Namath had been associated with the club it had changed from a dying, deserted old building

to one of New York's swingiest after-dark establishments. The waitresses were busty beauties. The customers were sports heroes like Namath's Jets teammates, or baseball players like Orlando Cepeda and Willie Davis and Stan Bahnsen of the Yankees, or hockey players like Rod Gilbert of the Rangers or basketball players like Cazzie Russell of the New York Knicks. It was a swinging place for the swinging sports crowd. Toots Shor's was a restaurant for another era. Bachelors III was a place for now.

Dellapina stood at the door as the reporters squeezed into the small lounge. The entire floor was about forty yards long, or the length of a good, quick Namath pass. It was ten feet wide. The chairs were of old wood and a metal furnace decorated the back of the room.

A huge painting of Namath in the green uniform of the Jets was spotted on a front wall. His eyes stared straight ahead on the picture, his concentration on his mission unmistakable. His white shoes almost glowed from the green of the picture. The white shoes were his trademark, his calling card, his brazen announcement to charging linemen: Come and get me if you can. From the last seat in the last row of Shea Stadium, where the Jets played their home games, Namath's shoes could be seen even when his huge number 12 was already a muddied blur.

"Hi," said Dellapina as he welcomed the press. "Squeeze yourself in. Get some coffee from one of the girls."

"I'd like to get more than coffee," one reporter said.

"Just coffee," said Dellapina. Then he laughed out loud.

It was 9:15 in the morning. A few reporters were busy pushing a Bloody Mary or two down their throats to wake them up. The girls offered coffee and Danish. Most of the reporters had gin or whisky or a Bloody Mary for breakfast.

"What time will Joe be here?"

"I don't know," said Dellapina.

"Will he be here?"

"God, I hope so. Can you imagine what would happen to me if he didn't show up. People would think I knew why."

Like Tallulah or Marilyn Monroe or Zsa Zsa or any

of the real stars, Joe was always late. It wasn't that he was discourteous. It was just that he never rushed. He was cool. When you're cool, you don't rush. On the football field. At a party. In life. At a press conference. So what if people came early or on time? That was their problem.

Several of the television faces were already there waiting for Namath. Howard Cosell sat at a small table drinking coffee with George Sauer of the Jets and his wife Janet. Kyle Rote and Frank Gifford, former teammates on the New York Giants, now turned television announcers, sat at another table. Soon they were joined by another former teammate, Pat Summerall. Somebody noticed the three former football players sitting together.

"You guys better be scared about this announcement. Namath said he is going to become a sports announcer."

At 9:20 the television cameras were ready. They were jammed into a corner of the room. A table of microphones was set up. The tape recorders were ready. The reporters had finished breakfast and were busy staring at the waitresses, who had been summoned for early morning service. The show was about to begin. The only thing missing was the star.

It was 9:25. The reporters grew restless. Some began to squeeze their way back to the bar for another shot of breakfast. They looked at the pictures hung from every open spot on the wall. Mickey Mantle knocking out a huge home run. The Four Horsemen riding to fame on brown ponies for an alert photographer. Rod Gilbert slashing home a goal. Bill Mathis of the Jets driving past two lunging tacklers to score a touchdown. Sammy Davis, Jr. Frank Sinatra. And a few more of Namath, in repose, in action, smiling, full face, dimpled cheeks, clefted chin, shaggy hair, dark, black eyebrows, green, deep set eyes. Sexy. Goddamnit, very sexy.

One small corner of the room was marked Playboy corner. Bunnies from the nearby Playboy club took rest and recuperation here after their long, grueling nights of having their tails examined by lecherous old men. Rozelle hadn't been heard to comment on that aspect of the club.

The frame of the room was painted a dark brown. It

separated the bar part of the room from the restaurant part. In one corner of the frame in a wavy hand, someone had written "Long live 1968." That was the first season the New York Jets had ever won a professional football league title. Then Namath had quarterbacked them to the Super Bowl win.

"The night we beat Oakland for the league title was the greatest," said Dellapina. "We won the Super Bowl in Miami, so everybody was far away. But the Oakland game was here and everybody was in. The fire regulations say we can seat seventy-five. We must have had six hundred in here that night. Joe was fabulous. He said hello to everybody. He never got tired. He was friendly, wonderful, marvelous. You know what, Joe would have made a fantastic headwaiter."

Now it was 9:40. About three hundred reporters, television men, camera people, engineers, had packed themselves into the small room. They waited. There was no more time for any more breakfast. If a reporter had a good spot on the floor for his seat, he wouldn't give it up. Reporters turned from each other to study the pictures on the wall. They were all exciting. One was beautiful. Just super-beautiful. It hung in the middle of the room. It was in the place of honor. It was the Mona Lisa of Bachelors III.

The picture was three feet high. It was two feet wide. It showed Joe Willie Namath of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, and New York City in an ankle length \$5,000 mink coat. Namath had his best put-on grin on his face. He wore the coat for the benefit of photographers at the Jets training camp before the 1968 season. He had a pair of shorts on underneath the coat. Nobody could see the shorts. The picture of Namath in his fur coat made most every newspaper in America.

"I made a deal with this furrier," Namath said. "He gave me the coat for free. All I had to do was pose for the picture. I didn't have to mention his name. Sometimes I like it. Sometimes I don't. One of these days I'll have it remodeled and given to my mother."

Namath's mother never got the coat. Burglars broke into Joe's Manhattan apartment one evening while he was

in Florida and stole the coat. Some crook's mother is walking around with Joe Namath's coat.

It was 10 o'clock. Rote, Gifford, Summerall and Cosell sat nervously at their microphones. Would Joe show? What if he decided not to come? Would they have to read an announcement and show some old film of Joe in action? They hated to face the possibility of spending the afternoon studying old Namath game films.

"Here he is, here he is," someone shouted. "Let him through, let him through. Get up, will ya? It's Joe. How the hell is he going to get into his own press conference? Stop pushing. Get the cameras. Catch his face. Stop pushing, damnit. Joe, over here, look over here; wave, Joe."

Namath refused to wave for CBS. He moved slowly through the crowd. He held a large cup of coffee in his right hand. He stepped over the bodies of reporters on his floor. Queen Elizabeth could not have been any gentler with Sir Walter Raleigh's coat. His head was down all the way to the small table with the microphones sitting in front of the room.

He wore a powder blue sports shirt open at the throat with the collar pulled over a light blue windbreaker. He wore tan bell-bottom slacks with a thin set of white stripes. He wore suede loafers. His green eyes looked tired. There was much red around the eyes.

"I know he couldn't have had much sleep," said Milton Gross of the *New York Post*. "I woke him up to ask him about it at 7 o'clock. Some broad answered the phone. She said she'd roll over and see if he could answer the phone."

The press conference had been called for early Friday morning. Late the previous evening, Earl Wilson, the syndicated gossip columnist of the *Post*, had heard that Namath was about to announce his retirement.

Namath had played softball Thursday afternoon in Central Park with the cast of the Broadway show "Promises, Promises." He had gotten a couple of hits and made two fine running catches in the outfield. He had limped a little from the constant weakness in his bad knees. He posed for pictures with two lovely girls from the chorus of the show. Namath had winked at them and they were wiped out for

a week. They had all they could do to go onstage that night. They had been charmed by the King.

After the softball game Namath told reporters, "There's less chance getting hurt standing out there in the outfield than walking the streets of New York."

He went home after the ball game and showed up at Bachelors III at about midnight. He had made up his mind to quit. He told several friends. They told others. Wilson heard about it and called his paper. Namath heard that Wilson now knew his plans and immediately called his publicist to arrange for a press conference at Bachelors III for 9:30 the next morning.

Now, at 10:06, Namath sat down before the reporters, the cameras and the television people and began talking. His right hand held the paper cup of coffee. His left hand was in his lap. He talked very slowly, choosing his words, drawling a little from four years at Alabama, trying to make everything as clear as he possibly could.

"When I originally talked about this I was just going to make an announcement and that would be it. I wasn't going to answer any questions. But now certain things came out and I'll answer questions after I make my statement."

He paused and cleared his throat. He lifted the coffee container to his lips and took a huge swallow. The reporters studied his face. Even in this early light, he was incredibly rugged-looking, a young, physically handsome man. His hair was very black and his sideburns ended halfway down his face. His nose was thick and long and prominent. His lips were full and sensuous. His cheeks were dimpled. The cleft in his chin was deeper and more conspicuous in the television lights. His eyes, those unbelievable green eyes, dominated his face.

"A couple of months ago a list of names was given to me and I was told they were undesirables who were hanging out in Bachelors III. I told the district attorney's office I would cooperate. Two days ago a man from the league office and a man from the FBI came down and said they would close this place down. When I asked them why, they wouldn't tell me."

Now the words came a little harder as Namath moved into the key area of his announcement.

"Mr. Rozelle and Mr. Iselin and Mr. Ewbank and I met with the commissioner in his office. Mr. Rozelle said if I didn't get out of the restaurant in two days he would suspend me. I don't want to do it. I don't have any choice. The last thing I want to do is quit. But it's a matter of principle. I'm quitting."

Then Namath covered his face and cried. The tears streamed down his cheeks. He kept his head down for several seconds and wiped at his face. The reporters looked down at the ground. These hard-bitten journalists were being made to feel embarrassed at being at a public wake. Namath had moved them to sympathy as quickly as he moved them to excitement when he threw a football thirty yards downfield.

Namath collected himself and continued talking.

"Because I'm a football player I can't be associated with these people. I'm not selling this place. I'm quitting. I've talked to my teammates, George Sauer, Don Maynard, Gerry Philbin, Billy Mathis, they understand, they know I'm innocent.

"This morning I called Coach Bryant at Alabama. He asked me if I had thought it over before I made the decision. I thought of nothing else for the last two days. It's something I don't want to do. It's something I have to do."

Bachelors III had attracted many of the leading sports stars in New York. According to Rozelle and police officials, it had also attracted gamblers. This seems to happen in many places. The sports heroes go where the girls are. The girls were in Bachelors III. The gamblers go where the sports heroes are. They talk to them, they get friendly, they pick up bits and pieces of information. They get the edge.

One police official said, "The place was crawling with the worst sort of characters. We had men in there, and there were all sorts of things going on downstairs. A bank of telephones was used by them. It was a case of Namath not knowing what was going on downstairs, but it was pretty bad."

Another high police official said, "Undercover agents had amassed enough evidence to close ten places."

Namath said he was being punished because he was a football player.

"The police showed me a list of names. They said they were known gamblers. I didn't know one name. They showed me pictures of several men. They said they were gamblers. I recognized three of them as customers in my place. I told the police that."

Namath had stated his case. He let it rest. He admitted that he knew gamblers frequented his restaurant. He said he had nothing to do with them. He said he did not know what was going on. The police apparently agreed. Rozelle said Namath was innocent of any personal wrongdoing.

"This is the worse kind of guilt by association," said Namath.

Football had been rocked by a betting scandal after World War II. Frank Filchok and Merle Hapes of the New York Giants had been charged with trying to dump football games. Pro football had kept a close watch on its players ever since. Signs are posted prominently in all football clubhouses that no betting was allowed.

Four years earlier Paul Hornung, the Joe Namath of the Green Bay Packers, had been suspended for a year by Rozelle, along with Alex Karras of the Detroit Lions. They were charged with associating with gamblers and making small bets on games, only for their own teams. Pro football, being sensitive to any hint of unsavory conduct, suspended each player for a year. Both returned to their teams the following season.

Now Rozelle was apparently following the same set of standards for Namath. Or maybe even a little stricter. Because of his Super Bowl win, Namath was the outstanding sports figure in America. At twenty-five he was already in the Jack Dempsey, Babe Ruth, Red Grange, Bill Tilden class of super-heroes of sport.

Namath took another long sip of coffee. "I'm ready for questions."

"Joe, do you think there's any chance of resolving the situation?"

He dabbed his hands at his red eyes. "I hope so," he said, "but I don't think so."

Somebody asked Namath if he could explain what he meant by principle. He bristled at the question. He did not feel he needed to explain. He was being loyal to his partners and friends in the restaurant. He did not feel he should be punished for being a football player and prevented from doing what he wanted. He felt persecuted.

Finally he said, "Everybody gambles. Is there a man in this room who has not placed a bet on a football game?" The reporters laughed and one man shouted, "I never have." He was hooted down. Namath continued to talk.

"Everybody gambles. My father gambles. He has gambled all his life. Sonny Werblin told me he had bet on the Super Bowl. Does that mean I shouldn't associate with Sonny Werblin?"

Werblin had purchased the Jets in 1964, brought Namath to New York for a \$400,000 bonus in 1965 out of Alabama, and had been his boss, his friend, his business adviser and his confidant ever since. He had signed Namath to a three-year contract early in 1968 and then sold out his interest in the Jets to his partners.

Namath was loyal to Sonny. It was a rare and noble trait. He was loyal to his friends and associates. He was refusing to play the company game. He was, as always, Joe Namath. He was, as always, marching to a different drummer.

"The other players who were suspended were suspended for betting. I haven't bet. I'm innocent. It's all a matter of principle."

Namath seemed to be stressing the point that loyalty to his friends was even more important than his pro football career. If he had to choose between his friends and playing football, he would choose his friends.

"You mean to say that you would rather run the restaurant than play football," said one reporter.

That was the question Namath knew was coming. "How Goddamn dumb can you be? If you don't know what the hell this is all about, I can't explain it."

His voice broke with emotion. He rubbed at his face again and drank deeply from the container of coffee as

he collected himself. Namath had always been an exciting, colorful person to interview. Reporters never knew what to expect of him. He could be charming, articulate, fascinating. He could be boorish, insensitive, curt. He had his moods, his moments, his favorites.

A reporter, quick to put down Namath's education at Alabama, once asked him, "What did you major in down there beside football? Basket-weaving?"

Namath let the words sink in. All the reporters waited for a blowup. Namath was too quick for that. He paused, summoned his best Alabama drawl and answered, "Oh, no, basket-weaving was too hard. I majored in journalism."

Now, with his virtuoso performance at his retirement press conference, he was majoring in journalism again.

He answered a couple of more questions. Then he seemed edgy to get moving. Frank Gifford, who had been through a painful retirement press conference of his own, whispered into Namath's ear. Joe smiled, looked at the reporters and said, "Thank you."

He struggled to his feet. He looked so very young. He had turned twenty-six a week before. He looked younger, very hurt, very afraid. He looked like a young boy who had a bad splinter in the heel of his foot and needed his mother very badly.

Namath got up and started toward the back of his club. Reporters pushed toward him and encircled him. "What about the knees? Are they any worse? What are you going to do now? Will you be at the Jets training camp as an observer in case this business is settled?"

Namath smiled at that one and shook his head. He probably thought some of the reporters weren't able to handle journalism either. Or basket-weaving.

He moved toward the door. He was joined by his lawyer, Mike Bite, of Alabama, who had negotiated his \$400,000 bonus contract and become Joe's friend for life. Namath waved to a couple of friends, stopped to talk to his teammate, George Sauer, patted one of his waitresses, who was in tears, and walked out the door.

Now the reporters gathered together for their joint interviews.

"Do you think he means it?"

"Means what? I was too far in the back to hear anything. What the hell did he say? Is it the knees?"

For another half-hour reporters stood around the bar at Bachelors III interviewing each other. There was some question whether or not Namath had closed the door on his career completely. The Jets really wouldn't know that for sure until he failed to show up in camp in July at Hofstra College in Long Island. If he didn't, there was always the chance he would report in time for the regular season in September. All else failing, there could always be next year. That was the way Paul Hornung did it.

"Oh, he's serious about it," said a friend. "He's had it. What with the knees and now this, what does he need it for? He's got his Broadway Joe's restaurants, he's got plenty of money left from his bonus, and he'll be in a movie with Glen Campbell. He doesn't need a thing. Even his mother agreed with his retirement. She was worried about his knee when she saw him recently in Beaver Falls. She said, 'Son, why don't you quit?' That was before this stuff about the club. Now I'm sure she is happy."

The coach of the New York Jets, Weeb Ewbank, was awakened early in the morning by a reporter who told him that he was losing his quarterback.

"I don't know anything about it," said Ewbank. "I saw him the other night at the football writers dinner at the Waldorf. He didn't say anything about quitting."

Some people had objected to Namath's conduct at the football dinner. At a light and free evening, he had snapped off a few off-color jokes with Supreme Court Justice Byron (Whizzer) White, a former pro football great, and several clergymen seated at the head table. Nobody seemed to object at the time. With the clear light of day, several people called it tasteless. Joe Namath was twenty-six years old. Joe Namath told dirty jokes. Joe Namath used bad words. Joe Namath didn't put the dirty words in a book. That made Joe Namath dirty. He was, again, marching to his own drummer.

Namath's retirement, as most Namath happenings, upstaged everything else in the world news. He led every news program in New York for several hours. He was the

first item on most television shows. Across the country, bulletins broke into recorded music with the flash, "Joe Namath quits." Poor Richard Nixon. He was about to take off for a historic Midway Island trip to visit with Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu and he couldn't even be number one. He was a loser again, this time in news space to Joe Namath.

The reaction to Namath's quitting was sure and swift. His teammates immediately lined up behind him against the Commissioner and they were getting in line to end their careers too.

Jim Hudson, a defensive back and close friend of Joe's, end George Sauer, and end Pete Lammons, all announced within moments of Joe's retirement that they also were giving up football. The Jets had struggled for eight long years to get a winner and now in one sweep of the Commissioner's broom, they were wiped out.

Hudson, a tough-tackling twenty-five-year-old Texan, said he sided with Namath all the way. He was ready to fight for the principle.

"It's guilt by association," said Hudson. "It's pure and simple a case of Joe being punished because he's a famous football player. We play before sixty-two thousand people at Shea and most of them have bet on the game. Some of the biggest names, some of the biggest people have bet in some of the biggest places. It's just not fair."

Hudson, saying what most football players believed and knew to be true, suggested Rozelle must give him the same ultimatum to quit football or give up their outside interests and friends.

"I know gamblers," said Hudson. "Everybody does. My friends back home know gamblers."

Namath had the knack of turning the sports fans on. He usually did it with a football in his hand. This time he had done it with his words. In bars and restaurants and lounges all over the country, people argued about Rozelle's right to restrict Namath's outside business. The fans wanted to know whether it was a free country or not. They wanted to know if the Constitution really meant what it said. They wanted to know if the law of the land that a man was innocent until proven guilty did not hold

for football players. If gambling is a crime, people said, then the gamblers should be arrested.

Obviously, if everyone who knew a gambler was arrested, there would be more people in jail than out. If it was strictly limited to professional athletes who knew professional gamblers, the crowd figures would still be pretty impressive.

Pete Rozelle, the man most directly involved in the conflict, admitted that he was surprised by Namath's announcement of retirement. He said he had no indication in conversations with Namath that the player was considering giving up football instead of giving up the restaurant.

"I was told only Thursday night that Namath's interests were in the process of being sold. Namath's lawyer said the entire deal would be finished by Friday morning at 10 a.m. and Joe would be out of the restaurant business."

Namath's answer to that was to call his press conference for 9:30, keep his restaurant, and retire from football.

Rozelle then called a press conference of his own later that afternoon and explained his stand.

"Namath is not suspended," said Rozelle. "He can have an appointment at any time and we can talk privately if he wants to reconsider. If he sells the restaurant, of course, there won't be any problem. I'd like him to play football very much. I was surprised that he could turn around and not sell after I thought we had agreed that he would sell."

Later in the afternoon lawyers were discussing the legal aspects of the case. Namath's lawyer refused to comment on the situation. Other lawyers thought that Bite might be saving his comments for court.

One lawyer said, "There actually might be a violation of Joe's rights as a citizen. Football players are no different than anybody else, before the law. They have a right to make as much money as they can. Namath has a right to run the restaurant. If the police think gamblers are in the place, they can arrest them, or they can shut the place down but they can't force Namath out of his own business if he doesn't want to sell."

Towards early evening on the sixth of June, 1969, just

twenty-five years after D-Day, Namath had become the most talked about person in the country. The purists, the establishment people, the conformists seemed to agree with Rozelle. Gamblers did frequent Bachelors III and Namath did have a piece of the place. Therefore, to be above any hint of any possible wrongdoing, he had to go.

The mod squad, the young football fans, the mini-skirted girls, the Madison Avenue guys, the worshipers of Broadway Joe Namath, saw nothing wrong with Namath's conduct.

"It's not Joe's job to watch out who comes into the place," said one young man in an Edwardian suit at Bachelors III. "Why don't the police arrest them and keep the place clean?"

Joe Dellapina, Joe's partner, said he worked hard at keeping any undesirable person out of the restaurant.

"We don't need business that badly. We are doing a hell of a business. What the hell would we want gamblers in here for? They don't buy drinks. The cops say all they do is use the phones. We got too many guys calling their girlfriends from here to tie up phones with any gamblers. I don't know what they are talking about."

Dellapina says the appearance of Namath any night he is in town is an open invitation to girls to flock to the restaurant. Girls can't help it. They like Joe. Joe can't help it, either. He likes girls.

"Hell, said Dellapina, "we have to fight them off, keep them out. It's nice to have girls in the place but you don't want to overload the place with girls."

Girls don't buy drinks as often as guys do, so the successful lounge in New York, like Bachelors III, or like former baseball player Phil Linz's Mr. Laffs, tries to regulate the amount of girls. They want to keep the girls outnumbered. It keeps the girls happy and the guys buying drinks.

"You wouldn't believe this, but when Joe is in here, he sits quietly at a table with his friends, eats dinner, has a couple of drinks, and enjoys the evening. No fuss, no bother, no autographs. Joe is just Joe, one of the guys. He can't help it if all the girls are standing away from him flipping. I wish it were me."

By the small hours of Friday night and Saturday morning, Bachelors III was still standing and Joe Namath was a retired football player. Nobody could be certain if it were for a day, for a week, or for always.

One mini-skirted beauty paraded sweetly out of Bachelors III with her boyfriend as a clock on Lexington Avenue read 4 a.m. She walked out of the door, waited while her escort called for a cab and talked about Joe

"Does it mean we won't be seeing him in here anymore?"

The thought suddenly frightened her. She turned back to Bachelors III. The door was now closed. She panicked. She finally smiled as she remembered the drawing of Joe in the window, the one with the goatee Joe wore before he shaved it for a razor company's \$10,000 fee.

She moved against the window and pressed her lips against the picture of Namath. "Goodbye," she said, "and we love you, Joe."

2

THE BEST OF BEAVER

Pennsylvania Highway 18 widens down the hill from New Brighton into Beaver Falls. There is a huge sign at the crest of the hill. It says: "Welcome to Beaver Falls where there's Unity in the Community."

They are certainly unified about one thing. They love Joe Willie Namath. The keynote of their testimonial dinner for him was "Seventh Avenue to Broadway." They were talking about their Seventh Avenue and Broadway Joe's Broadway.

Seventh Avenue is the wide, main downtown street in Beaver Falls, a town of some 16,000 people in the valley of Beaver County, some forty miles from Pittsburgh. Steel is the main industry of the town, but they are most proud of their people. The people are tough, rugged Pennsylvanians, who brave the cold winters, parade around in light jackets and open shirts in zero weather, work hard for a modest living and share the pride of their commu-

nity. The streets are clean. The traffic moves quickly. Everybody says hello to everybody else. Even a meter maid, who broke all scoring records one year by writing 35,000 parking tickets, is greeted like a friendly old aunt.

Beaver Falls was the home of several recognized athletes, including Joe Walton, who played football for the Giants; Jim Mutscheller, who played for Notre Dame and the Baltimore Colts; baseball player Joe Lonnet, who was with the Phillies; and All-American Frank (Tiger) Walton, Joe Walton's father, who played for Pittsburgh and received many honors before turning pro.

Richie Allen of the Phillies lived down the road from Namath, about six miles into Wampum.

Steel mills and steel processing plants dot the town. Republic Steel has a huge plant on one end of town. Namath's father, John, works for Babcock and Wilcox, a manufacturer of steel tubing at the other end of town.

The real action is on Seventh Avenue. The Cinema was showing Chitty Chitty Bang Bang one day and its marquee implored its customers "to fight pay tv." They could start fighting it by signing a petition after the doors opened at 1:30.

The Uptown Inn had hot fish for sale and Schmidt's beer. W. H. Wise Jr. advertised mortgage loans and notary public service. Domino's Bar, advertising itself as the home of "The Variations," was selling hot sausages for 45 cents and meatballs for 35 cents. Echo Point Restaurant had crazy fruit drinks for three cans for 99 cents and the Bentley Loan Company was showing its Beaver Falls Chamber of Commerce sticker proudly. They even had a picture of the Beaver Falls High School baseball team in the window. The team had finished a 23-1 season, and all the smiling kids, including one black lad, might someday grow up to be like Joe Willie.

But Beaver Falls really wasn't like Broadway. The tallest building was two stories high and a real estate office showed listings of three-bedroom houses for \$8,500.

"It seems like all we got in town," said Greg Benedetti, a young sportswriter for the Beaver Falls *News-Tribune*, "are banks, bars and funeral homes. But the people are real nice."

Namath had those same thoughts a half-dozen years earlier. He would seek his fortune with his arm, but his roots—and his people—would always be here.

Namath was born in Beaver Falls on May 31, 1943. He was the fourth son of Mr. and Mrs. John Namath. His brothers all were athletes and he wore his first uniform and made his first athletic team when he was eight. The picture of the Elks Baseball team, with a smiling Joey Namath in the front row, hangs in the gallery of his friend Ernie's bar. There are dozens of pictures of Namath, in school, in college, in the pros and on the cover of national magazines. The Four Horsemen of Beaver Falls Junior High School were Joe Willie Namath, wearing number 17, Harry James, John Young, and Jerome Alexander.

Russ Chiodo, a pressman at the *News-Tribune*, remembers Joe from his junior high school days.

"I have a first cousin, Richard," said Russ, "and he and Joe played together at Beaver Falls Junior High. Joe's biggest disappointment was in getting cut from the junior high school team. He was too skinny to hold the ball. A few years later Joe could palm two balls. I know his brothers and his whole family. They all have big hands. It's no surprise to me that Joe could grow up like that and pass like he can. I knew he would have good hands."

Chiodo says that the Joe Namath of 1959 is pretty much like the Joe Namath of 1969.

"Joe has always been a devil-may-care kind of guy. He liked to have fun. He liked to have his kicks. You know how kids are. They think a lot of things are funny that adults don't think are funny. That's what makes them kids."

Namath had an old Ford and Chiodo was walking down Seventh Avenue one night when all of a sudden he heard some strange noise.

"I turned around and here was Joe driving on and off the curb with the old jalopy. Just for kicks. Just for fun. Just to see if he could do it. Nobody was on the street and it was late. Nobody could get hurt. I don't know what would have happened if the cops came. I guess Joe just

knew there were no cops around at that time of night."

Like most people in Beaver Falls, Chiodo followed Namath's career through his high school days, his college days at Alabama and on to the pros with the Jets.

"I even went to see him play a couple of times in Alabama," said Chiodo. "He was great as always. I don't know if I should say this with all that's going on with Joe, but I bet forty-eight dollars on the Super Bowl on Joe. He said he was going to win. Joe never lies. So I bet it."

Chiodo was anxious for Namath to settle his problems with Pete Rozelle and play football again when he discussed the matter in early July.

"If the characters that they say are involved in the place, I would have only one message for Joe: 'Sell, Baby, Sell.' That's what I'd tell him. I don't think he'll ask me. Joe's just an independent guy. He's the same way he was when he was a kid. Joe's never changed. What do you hear in New York? Will Joe play?"

Joe Willie Namath was a skinny, bony-faced fifteen-year-old with a crew cut in the summer of 1958. His brothers had played football at Beaver Falls High, and despite his unexciting junior high school career, he went out for the varsity football team at Beaver Falls High. The school has an enrollment of 1,600 and a long tradition of football success. Beaver Falls High has no football field but it does have a baseball field. The football team works out on the baseball field and plays its games at Geneva College's Reeves Stadium. On the south end of the field the goal posts stare at the huge metal barrels of the Armstrong Cork Co. The north end of the field faces College Avenue. The stands, which hold 8,500 people, are on the west side, and the east side opens toward the fieldhouse. This is where Joe Willie would start the long road to Broadway.

It started with plenty of bumps.

Bill Ross, a bull of a man with two football-playing sons, was Namath's first varsity coach. Joe came to him from the junior high school ranks. Ross was the coach who didn't think the future Super Bowl quarterback was one of his fifty best players at the start of the 1958 season.

"We have this summer camp at Harmony, Pennsylvania," Ross explained, "and we take our fifty best kids. We carry about seventy-five players during the season but only fifty can make it to camp. The kids think it's a vacation when they go there, but they find out differently after they arrive. It's plenty tough."

Ross had his varsity quarterback, a senior; a back-up quarterback, a junior; and three sophomore quarterbacks. He took two of them to camp and left Joe Willie home.

"I could tell you I knew he was going to turn out like he did but I'd be lying. He was just another skinny quarterback. You see a lot of kids like Joe. If I thought he was that good I would have taken him to camp," Ross said.

One of the sophomore quarterbacks he did take became ill at the camp and never played any football. Namath never got to the camp until his junior year.

Namath reported that sophomore season a week before the camp was to open. When the squad list came out and he wasn't on it, he didn't complain.

"Not to me anyway," said Ross. "He just stayed back with the other boys and worked on his own. I'd give them shoes and a few footballs and they could do some running and throwing and kicking."

The fortunate fifty came back from the camp with wonderful war stories, and Joe Namath listened to their marvelous tales of torture. Another week went by and Beaver Falls opened its season. Joe Namath, now a member of a seventy-five man squad, never moved from the bench.

"One afternoon," said Ross, "I was coming out of practice. Joe and another boy came up to me and said they were leaving the team. I didn't care about the other boy. He wasn't very good, but I cared about Joe. His size was against him, but he seemed to have some talent."

The small, skinny sophomore quarterback looked up at his large coach and said, "I think I should quit. I'm too small. I'm not getting any place. I'll concentrate on basketball."

"Joe," said Ross, "you'll grow. You'll get big enough. Go home and think about it. Talk to your father about it."

Namath was living with his mother then, as the parents were separated.

"I'll tell you the truth," said Ross. "I have no idea if he talked to anybody. I never ever talked to him about it. The next day he was out on the field for practice. That was good enough for me."

Namath got into a couple of games, only on defense, and didn't play enough to earn a varsity letter. He did earn a nickname. He was wearing uniform number nineteen and that was the year Baltimore's number nineteen, John Unitas—Johnny U., as the sportswriters called him—led Baltimore to the championship.

The skinny kid with the bony face and the crew cut who sat on the last seat of the Beaver Falls High bench, became known as Joey U.

"We used to practice two hours a day. Joe took his lumps out there. That's what the sophomores usually do. But he never complained. And I never had any trouble with him. I'm glad he decided to stay on the team."

Ross called to his oldest son, a freshman quarterback at the University of Michigan. "Bring down the picture." The boy returned in a moment with an impressive drawing of Namath. It was autographed.

"Thanks for all your help," it said, "throughout the years. I know I would be doing other things if it weren't for you. Thanks. Joe Willie Namath."

"He was a devilish kid," said Ross, "but he never hurt anybody and he was a good boy. You know, he never called me anything but Mr. Ross. To this day it's Mr. Ross and yessir, nossir. I hope he plays again."

Joe Willie Namath was in jail once in Beaver Falls. He was taken to the police lockup because he climbed a flagpole to paint his school colors before a big football game and the police caught him up there. They gave him a chance to make one phone call. He called his coach, Larry Bruno.

"His parents were separated and I guess I was like a second father to him," said Bruno. "That made me very proud."

Ross resigned the head coaching job at Beaver Falls High in 1959 to become the athletic director at the school. His good friend, Larry Bruno, got the job.

Bruno worked informally with some of his boys in the

summer of 1959. He wanted to check his material before the training season actually began.

"We had a senior quarterback when Joe was a junior. We have a tough league out here and very few sophomores ever play varsity ball. Only the real great ones. I knew Joe hadn't played much, but he had lots of potential."

Namath was 5-6 and 135 pounds as a sophomore when he failed to make Ross's camp squad. He was three inches taller and 25 pounds heavier when he did make Bruno's camp squad in 1959.

"We had a real good senior quarterback and I knew Joe wouldn't be first string. He had improved quite a lot over the summer and he started to show that he was going to be a good high school player."

Bruno didn't expect more than that from Namath. He wasn't exceptionally big or exceptionally strong or exceptionally quick.

"He had a good arm and that good release he has now," says Bruno. "But he really hadn't developed enough for you to notice anything special about him."

Namath did well in the summer camp and from number-two quarterback in Bruno's early plans he became number-one-and-a-half.

"We sort of alternated him with the senior quarterback," said Bruno. "He got a lot of playing time but he didn't start any games. If you have a senior quarterback, you usually start the senior."

Bruno developed a sincere friendship with his junior quarterback and began thinking about the big things they could accomplish together in 1960.

"Joe was beginning to grow physically and gain confidence," Bruno said. "He wasn't cocky. He was confident. And the other players loved him. Just like the Jets do now."

As a sixteen-year-old, Namath began showing the special skills that were to carry him from Seventh Avenue to Broadway to Hollywood and Vine.

"Joe can pick out a defense better than any quarterback I ever saw. He is very quick in sizing things up and very quick in picking up pointers. I would say something

to him and he would do it. And he would never wave his hands or show disagreement. If I told him we would throw a banana pass, he would call it. When he called a play everybody knew that was the best play in the world."

The first inkling of what Joe Namath was to become on a football field occurred in Beaver Falls' final game against New Brighton. Bruno had started his seniors as tradition has it for a final high school game. But he knew that his juniors were better.

"After a little while I sent my next year's team in there. Joe and all the juniors. Joe was something, passing, running, kicking. We beat them, 51-6. We knew we would have some team in 1960."

Namath grew to six feet and weighed 185 pounds by the time he was a senior. He was growing in every direction. Somewhere along about that time, Namath discovered or was discovered by the girls.

"He didn't have a steady girl that I know of," said Bruno, "but he dated a lot of girls. He really loved to dance. He just loved to have fun."

Namath also spent a lot of time with his Negro classmates picking up language, culture and customs from them. Sometimes his less tolerant teammates found Namath's friends distasteful. With his dark complexion and Negro friends, he was often called "nigger" by some of his classmates.

There were several Negroes on the 1960 team at Beaver Falls, regarded as the finest in the school's history.

"Everybody knows about Joe, of course," says Bruno, "but we had several other very good players. Eleven players from that team wound up with football scholarships."

The season opened with the Beaver Falls Tigers beating Midland, 43-13. Namath, now the first string quarterback, scored on two long bootleg plays, one for 62 yards, and passed and ran his team to an easy win.

Sharon High was the next victim as the Tigers swept them off the field with a 39-7 win. The only unhappy note of that game was an ankle injury suffered by Namath early in the game.

By midweek, he had not completely recovered. He

couldn't run but he could pass. The problem was, he was also the team's kicker.

"I went up to him on Thursday and asked about his ankle. 'Joe, can you punt with that leg?' He looked me in the eye, laughed, and said, 'Coach, we won't have to punt.' And we didn't. We went through the whole game and never had to punt."

The Tigers had beaten New Castle, 39-0.

By now the college scouts were getting wind of the sensational running, passing and play calling of Joe Willie Namath. He had grown big enough for college ball, strong enough and was quick enough with his arms and his legs. They began to make serious pitches for his services.

"I'd be too embarrassed to tell you what college it was," said Larry Bruno, "but one of the offers was incredible. One of the scouts came around and started to take Joe out to steak dinners every night. Imagine a kid like that, coming from a background of hard work, eating steak dinners in fancy restaurants. It had to sway him. Then one day Joe was sitting in my car and a scout came over to join us. He said to Joe, 'Let's stop beating around the bush. How much will it take to get you? We'll give you \$200 a month and a car. Okay?' Joe was a kid but he stayed away from that kind of thing," Bruno said.

Recruiting of college players from the high school ranks is a skill and a science. Big college stadiums have to be filled. It is no accident that year after year the same colleges fill stadiums, play in Bowl games, enrich the university's treasury by countless thousands of dollars. College players are bought on the open market. Larry Bruno said Joe Namath could not be bought. Not then, not now, not ever.

The scouts were really bearing down by the fourth game, as Namath led Beaver Falls to a 25-13 verdict over Ambridge. This game will always be remembered by Namath. It almost cost him his career.

"I don't know how it happened," said Bruno, "and Joe never knew but when the game was over he had a shoulder separation. I always have the kids report the next day after a game so we can check on injuries. Joe came out the next day with his arm in a sling."

Namath had gone to a doctor after feeling pain after the game. The doctor had looked at the shoulder, diagnosed it as a severe shoulder separation and told Joe that he couldn't play that next week and probably never again.

"Joe was in tears when he came out to the field. He just cried. 'I'm finished. I can't play football anymore.' I never saw a boy so unhappy. He was so determined to play that we couldn't give up that easy."

Bruno sent Namath to an orthopedic specialist in the town of Beaver. "He was the best man in the county," said Bruno. "Everybody knew his reputation."

The specialist came up with a different diagnosis. Namath had suffered a slight shoulder separation instead of a severe one. The doctor prescribed exercises and special harness. Beaver Falls had an open date on their schedule and Namath would have two weeks to recover.

"He ran hard all the time and practiced without moving his arm but he was ready when we played the next game," Bruno said.

Namath passed and ran Beaver Falls to a 26-6 win over Butler. Then Beaver Falls beat Farrell 33-18 and Aliquippa 34-7.

The last game of the season was against Ellwood City. With the pressure of an undefeated season and the Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League title at stake, Namath led the Tigers to a 26-0 win.

Namath had completed his senior year at Beaver Falls by leading his team to an undefeated season, a championship of their league, and state recognition. He was named to the All-Conference team, was mentioned for high school All American honors and played in the annual Big 33 game at Hershey, Pennsylvania, between Texas and Pennsylvania stars. Namath had thrown for thirteen touchdown passes, an astounding amount in high school football, especially Pennsylvania high school football, famous for its style of crunch-crunch-crunch.

With the last game of the 1960 season the college scouts really began zeroing in on Namath. He still had a basketball and baseball season to complete but the college scouts don't wait.

A friend of Joe's, Al Hassan, was the manager of the

football team at Maryland. Joe wanted to join him there and began thinking about playing at Maryland. All he had to do was pass the college boards. Notre Dame was also pretty much in the picture. Namath's mother was having some stomach trouble. Notre Dame's representative suggested that Mrs. Namath see a specialist for her problems and that the bill be sent to him. There is more than one way to buy a football player.

"I'll tell you when Notre Dame lost out," said Bruno. "Joe and I went out to see them play against Iowa. Hughie Devore was their scout and he had arranged it. We got there all right and when we went to the game there were no tickets for us. I had talked to the Iowa coach a couple of times about some of our boys so I knocked on his door and told him who I was. A student manager said they didn't have any tickets. Just about when we were about to give up, here comes Hughie Devore. He says, 'Oh yeah. You're Namath from Pennsylvania. Then he gives us the tickets. I was sure Joe wouldn't go there after that. They just weren't interested enough to bother about him.'"

Namath went through the basketball and baseball seasons. It looked like Maryland as the summer ended. First, he had to turn down a \$30,000 bonus contract from the Chicago Cubs. They wanted him but Namath felt he would be happier as a college football player. By late summer Namath told Bruno he had decided on Maryland. He took the college boards and failed. Then he took them again and failed by a couple of points.

"I know a lot of boys who had the college boards taken for them," said Bruno, "but Joe isn't like that. If he couldn't make it, he wouldn't go."

Namath was disappointed but settled on Alabama after one of the Maryland coaches had called Paul (Bear) Bryant to tell him Namath was now available.

"I was in summer camp by then," said Bruno. "I was working hard getting ready for the 1961 season. We had a lot of work ahead of us with Joe gone. Somebody came up to me and showed me a paper 'Hey, Larry. Joe's going to Alabama.' I couldn't believe it."

Bruno and his wife and family have always kept a

close relationship with Namath. They see him every time he's in Beaver Falls.

"My wife can cook spaghetti real good, so when we hear Joe is coming over we call his mother and set a date. 'Rose, when Joe comes in this time we'll have spaghetti on Tuesday. Okay?' So she comes over and we all have a few drinks and a real good time."

Bruno sent out for his pictures of Namath. He had a dozen candid color shots of Namath, no longer a skinny, crew-cut, bony-faced high school player. Joe had his beard and he was being kissed by Mrs. Bruno. A beautiful blonde girl sat on the corner of the couch watching the affectionate scene.

"That's Suzie Storm," said Bruno. "That's Joe's number one girl now. She likes spaghetti, too."

Bruno then opened up his proudest possession, a book of photographs taken at Namath's testimonial dinner at Beaver Falls in May.

"Here's the mayor giving Joe the key to the city. It's not much of a key, is it? Oh, here's one with Joe and the mayor. Oh, the mayor's sleeping. It was a long program. And here's the one with Joe and the people from the Boosters Club. Now here's the one with Joe making his humble speech. That was really some affair. We worked three months on it getting the tables arranged and all the guests. Here's the one with Joe and his backfield coach, Clive Rush. He's with Boston now. Joe said he felt sorry for him now that he had to lose to the Jets."

They will talk about Joe Namath's testimonial night and day in Beaver Falls for a long, long while. Everybody has his own memory. Greg Benedetti, the young sportswriter, was amazed that nobody was killed.

"Some of those kids just lay down in front of the cars. That car was really crushed when it left here. I think they had to pay a hundred dollars to repair it," he said.

Bruno pointed out the picture on the plaque they gave to Namath. It showed him uncoiling a pass in the Super Bowl. Bruno, after all, is a football coach, and Joe Namath, after all, is a football player.

"He wore nineteen here and we retired it that night. Nobody will ever wear it again," he said.

Benedetti said that was only the official retiring of the uniform number.

"Nobody wore it from the day Joe left Beaver Falls," he said. "Everybody knew he was the best we would ever have."

"He was," said Bruno, "the best in everything. He could beat you at football, basketball, baseball, pool, any game. Don't bet against Joe."

It was time to go, and Bruno, like everybody in Beaver Falls, was interested in one thing.

"Will he play again?"

Bruno couldn't believe that a place like Bachelors III has caused all that excitement. He was told it wasn't even twice the size of his screened-in porch.

"I heard it was small," he said. "But you know Joe. He's loyal to his friends."

It was time to leave and a visitor wished Bruno a happy football season at Beaver Falls and maybe even another Joe Willie Namath.

The football coach looked out at the rain from his porch. A small smile came to his face. He said softly, "Thank you, but there will never be another Joe Willie Namath."

The day they remember in Beaver Falls was January 12, 1969. It was a mild day in the valley and some people actually walked the streets in light summerweight jackets. Jack Sheridan, who owns Rio Restaurant on Seventh Avenue—a pleasant lunch, dinner and friendly drinking place—was sitting alone in his establishment. He had some paper work to catch up on.

"We're closed on Sunday," he said, "and I usually come down here for a couple of hours to catch up on some of the work I can't get done on the days I am open. That Sunday I was sitting in the place all alone when I realized it was almost time. I finished up my work, closed the place and set out for home. I wasn't about to miss the game."

Joe Willie Namath of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, was the major attraction and the people in town planned on only one activity that day. They would sit by their tele-

vision sets and watch their boy win this football game.

"The streets were deserted," said Sheridan. "Usually on a Sunday there are a few people walking downtown just for the exercise, if nothing else. Not this day. Not a soul. Not anywhere. Everybody was sitting close to the television set to watch the show.

"When I walked out I couldn't see a single person. Down the other end of the street I finally saw a cop. He was the only person I had seen in town all day."

Sheridan got into his car, turned his motor over and heard that pathetic stillness of a dying automobile battery. He was presented with a difficult choice.

"I could get into the car and see if it would start after I waited. Or I could walk down to the service station and see if anybody was in there who could help me. Then I thought about the game. What if I was in the service station when the game began?"

Sheridan acted like any good Beaver Falls man would act that day.

"I walked home a mile and made it just in time for the opening kickoff," he said.

Sheridan watched Namath's magic as he led the Jets to their 16-7 Super Bowl win in Miami.

"Joe was terrific," he said. "We weren't surprised. I remember when he was in high school and won a game and the people would all come in here for a few drinks. Joe wasn't coming in then. He was too young, but he comes in now when he's in town. He was here a couple of Christmases ago. He was with one of the assistant coaches from the high school team and he kept calling him Mister. The coach wasn't more than a couple of years older than Joe."

Namath sat at Jack's bar that Christmas with his old assistant coach and had a couple of Scotches. "He drinks Johnny Walker in New York but he settles for Cutty Sark here. Everybody was coming over to say hello. He was like he always was. He could turn it on or turn it off anytime he wanted. That's the way he is."

Namath finished his two Cutty Sarkes and was about to leave when he reached into his pocket and placed two single dollar bills in Sheridan's hand.

"That's what I tip for two drinks in New York," he said, "and it's all the same to me."

Sheridan took the money and put it into his pocket. "Two bucks is two bucks," he said. "Joe Namath or anybody."

Sheridan watched all of Namath's games in high school and is convinced he is the best quarterback in the world.

"He's the best I ever saw," he said. "I don't believe there could be anybody any better."

Sheridan hasn't seen Namath for a while. He didn't even get to see him last May when the whole town turned out to honor Joe in the huge Seventh Avenue parade.

"I was watching the bar," Sheridan remembers, "when somebody yelled that the motorcade with Joe was going by. All of a sudden I looked up and the place was empty. Everybody had run out the door to see the parade. By the time I got out there the only thing I could see were the cops. It was all gone."

Thousands turned out for the parade and another 1,500 gathered at Methany Fieldhouse at Geneva College that night for the banquet and testimonial to their favorite quarterback. It was actually the second time Beaver Falls had honored Joe. They gave him a banquet in 1965 after he had completed his college career at Alabama and signed with the Jets, but that one was junior league compared to this one.

Jack Sheridan paid this banquet the highest compliment he knew. "This banquet was real downtown," he said.

In Beaver Falls there was nothing better than being downtown.

Thomas Wolfe once wrote, "You can't go home again." But Joe Namath had. And he had proved to be a big hit by telling his town what they wanted to hear, that he loved them, that he remembered them, that he will always feel part of them.

Joe Willie Namath, the skinny little kid with the bony face and the crew cut, had come a long way from the Elks Baseball team, from Beaver Falls Junior High, from Beaver Falls High, from Seventh Street and from the thick, heavy smoke of the steel mills. He had come, as the folks in Beaver Falls had put it, from Seventh Avenue

to Broadway with a lot of stops in between and so many more to follow. He had left his lasting imprint on the town.

As Larry Bruno had said, "There will never be another Joe Namath." It just couldn't happen again. Certainly not in Beaver Falls.

3

YANKEE IN ALABAMA

The smell of magnolia permeated the air that September afternoon in 1961 when Joe Willie Namath arrived at the steaming campus of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Paul W. Bryant, the football coach who was to offer himself as a candidate for president of the United States, stood on top of a small tower surveying his players. Alabama football players are not usually very big. They are lean and tough and hungry. They can run all day. They hit with passion and grow sick at the thought of losing a game. They had lost a game once on a Saturday and Bryant called a practice for 4:30 the next morning. Everybody was ready to go. They did not lose again for another year.

Alabama meant football excellence and Bryant worked at his job with religious intensity. His success was no accident. A tall, broad shouldered man, Bryant stood on the tower that blazing summer afternoon, a baseball cap pulled tight over his eyes, a megaphone in his hand, the sweat running down his neck. He saw the figure of one of his coaches, Howard Schnellenberger, walking across the field. He had driven from the airport with an 18-year-old freshman, past the campus, past Paul W. Bryant Hall, a three-story brick building where the jocks lived, entertained by Muzak, comforted by controlled air conditioning. They had parked alongside the practice field and now the coach and the young man, Joe Namath, walked toward the tower.

Namath wore a checked sports jacket and small-brimmed hat with a silly feather and dark glasses to pro-

tect his precious green eyes from the Southern sun. Namath walked near the tower and Bryant said, "Would you all like to come up, Joe?"

"Sure, man," said Namath. "Why not?"

Namath moved to the tower and several players studied him. Namath was thin and young. He had a toothpick clenched in the corner of his mouth. His swarthy skin was deeply sunburned. His manner was slow and shuffling. He climbed the ladder to the tower and stood with Bryant to survey the 1961 Alabama varsity, destined to become the national champions.

"Hey, who is that guy?" asked one player.

"I don't know. Looks like some sportswriter to me."

"Not up in the tower he ain't no sportswriter."

"If he is, he must be a nigger sportswriter."

Namath never heard the remark, but he was to hear the whispers in his early Alabama days. He was dark, he was sunburned and he did talk differently. His teammates did call him "nigger" behind his back. They also were quick to nickname him "toothpick" for his habit of chewing hard on a toothpick wherever he was: in class, in the locker room or at a party.

Butch Henry, a tackle and end on the Alabama football team in 1961, was to become Namath's roommate and friend. Henry is now a dentist in Tuscaloosa.

"I remember the early days with Joe," he said. "He did have a tough time when he first came down here. He talked different, he walked different, he dressed different. But once anybody got to know him, he was a great guy. Joe has always been a very likable person."

When Namath climbed to the tower with Bryant he was to start an enduring relationship. It was to last through his entire college career and forever after.

"Bear has had more influence on me than any other person I ever met," Joe said years later. "I don't know how he does it, but he can make a winning team out of nothing. He used to say, 'When you win, the air smells sweeter, your food tastes better, your girl looks prettier.' He made us all believe it."

Bryant will always have a soft spot in his heart for Namath. He was an exceptional college prospect when

he came to Alabama. He left with a \$400,000 bonus contract in his pocket.

"He was just a great athlete," said Bryant, "the best I ever saw. He was a great basketball player, great baseball player. Could have been great at anything. He just looked like a champion."

Namath stood on the tower with Bryant that smoking hot day in Tuscaloosa and looked like anything but a champion. He stayed up there with Bryant for fifteen minutes. The conversation touched on football and college life and all the things Bear and Joe could accomplish together in four years if everybody worked hard. Bryant, who has the sound of magnolia falling from his lips, kept repeating the word "stud." It was to be Joe's dominant memory of the meeting that day.

Namath was a stud, all right. In every sense of the word. Bryant's "studs" were football players who would rather fight than eat; they were fellows who got psychological stimulation from the brutal body contact of football. Bryant liked nothing more than to see his fast, tough teams, his "studs," overwhelm other bigger, stronger teams. And they had been doing it for years. With Namath, Bryant dreamed of greater glories for Alabama.

The adjustment from Pennsylvania high school big shot to an unrecognized freshman at Alabama was a difficult one for Joe. It took a while before he really felt secure in the strange environment of the South.

"I was a Hungarian Catholic in a light, protestant area," he said. "But before you know it, a lot of dark-skinned foreign-looking people from Tuscaloosa and Birmingham came out of the woodwork to be friendly. It's funny how people can always find their own. That's how Mike Bite and I got together."

Bite, who is a dark-skinned, easy-going man of Lebanese background, was playing golf one day. Namath chose the same day to practice his game. They played together, struck up a friendship, and walked hand in hand through the rigors of signing a \$400,000 contract.

Namath's early days at Alabama were as unpleasant as his early days with the Jets were to be. At Alabama, he

was a Northerner in a Southern atmosphere. With the Jets, he was rich in a poor atmosphere.

"I remember when he first joined us," said Sam DeLuca, the fine guard of the Jets in Joe's rookie year. "He didn't say much; was sort of shy actually, but still some players resented him. One of the players, Wahoo McDaniel, was a linebacker who was getting a lot of ink. He was a colorful guy and the year before got most of the press. The fans used to yell 'Wahoo, Wahoo' on any play they thought he came near. One day we were running laps at Peekskill. We were going around the goal posts and Joe went down. Wahoo had tripped him. Joe got up and made out like it was an accident. Wahoo laughed but he didn't do it again."

Butch Henry said Joe was accepted a lot quicker around the campus of Alabama. He was friendly, outgoing and likable. When the other players saw the attention he was getting from Bear Bryant they decided to like him too.

"Joe was always shy, really," said Henry. "We would stay in our room a lot and just talk. Joe would pass a lot of the time just shining his shoes. Just sit there and shine and shine and shine. He was always clothes-conscious, even then, as a kid, and he liked to be the best dressed guy on the team. While I studied, he shined his shoes."

Henry thinks that Namath could have been a much better student than he showed. Namath majored in industrial arts. He never had any trouble with grades but he never did much studying either.

"Joe just never had the background to be a good student. He was a football star in high school and probably didn't pay too much attention to his studies there. When he came to Alabama, football was the only thing on his mind. Joe's a bright boy; he could have been a good student. He is very intelligent. You can't be a professional football quarterback without being very intelligent," Henry said.

Joe became a regular quarterback in his second year at Alabama and after that he never lacked for pocket money. A football player didn't get rich at Alabama, but

he made out well under the system, and supposedly, within the rules.

"We would get a certain amount of tickets for each game," said Henry. "Then you could do what you wanted with them. Most guys sold them for extra money. On some of those real big games you could get \$25 or \$50 for a five dollar ticket. That would add up to quite a few dollars after a while," he said.

Namath, who had learned to respect a dollar while growing up in Beaver Falls, now had more money than he knew how to spend in a college scene. Most of it went on his back.

"Joe's wardrobe was just out of this world," said Henry. "He could really dress. You very rarely saw him with the same sports jacket twice."

Namath came to Alabama by a strange route. After graduation from Beaver Falls he signed a grant-in-aid for Maryland. He wanted to play for coach Tom Nugent, who had won the recruiting fight with Alabama, Notre Dame and a hundred other schools who all knew of Namath's exploits.

"We sure did try to recruit him," said Bryant. "Everybody would like to get a fine athlete like that."

Namath chose Maryland and Nugent for no special reasons. There was only that one hitch: Namath had to pass the College Boards. Maryland treated its football players like students. Namath took the College Boards and flunked. Then he was allowed to take them again and flunked again. This time he only missed by about two points.

Tom Nugent, the Maryland coach, realized he couldn't get him, so he phoned Bryant.

"We've got this kid Namath signed. He didn't pass the College Boards. We think he might be interested in playing for you," Nugent said.

Bryant's reputation was national. Everybody in Beaver Falls knew about Alabama's football teams about as well as they knew about Namath's football skills. Namath wanted to play for a big-time school. He was thinking of a professional career. He needed the right school to project him into the pro picture.

Bryant sent Howard Schnellenberger, one of his assistant coaches, to Beaver Falls to talk to Joe. Schnellenberger had coached at Kentucky when one of Joe's older brothers had played there for a short while. He knew Namath casually, knew the family quite well, and knew how to win Namath. He won his mother.

It was the same approach that helped the Jets land him. Chuck Knox, an assistant coach to Weeb Ewbank, had coached in Western Pennsylvania. He knew Namath and his family, and set up the first contacts for Sonny Werblin and Weeb Ewbank.

Schnellenberger rushed to Pennsylvania with the word of Bear. They wanted him to play football for them.

"I guess there were two reasons I chose Alabama after I didn't get into Maryland. Coach Schnellenberger was honest with me and I wanted to play for Coach Bryant. His reputation was pretty big. I knew that I would learn a lot of football from him."

So on a hot, steaming September day, Joe Namath arrived in Alabama with his feathered hat to start trodding the long road that would lead to the \$400,000 rainbow.

The early days were difficult. Namath spent much time alone. He went to movies alone. He ate alone. He walked the streets of the campus alone. Freshman football players, even if they are Joe Namath, are not really noticed.

Dr. Henry remembers the first time he did stop and look at the fellow who was to become his good friend and roommate the following year. The varsity was working out before a big game and the freshmen were far away on the other side of the field.

"We were working on kickoff returns. We just didn't have anybody who could kick far enough to make us go into a deep pattern. I guess the team we were playing had a good kicker and Coach Bryant wanted us to practice getting them in the end zone. The coach said to one of his assistants, 'Get Joe over here.' And now Joe came over, sort of hunched over like he always was, sort of half running, half walking.

Bryant said something to Joe and the freshman stood behind the line. Now he took the football in his hands at the twenty, looked downfield and sort of flipped it with

those huge wrists, those large fingers all the way to the goal line. The ball hit at the end zone and bounced in, some eighty, ninety yards away. If you were on that field that day there was no way not to notice him.

"It was his fingers," said Henry. "I got big hands, big fingers, but Joe just overlapped my fingers by far. Coach Bryant used Joe the rest of the season that way so we could practice our returns. Nobody ever kicked a football as far as Joe could throw it. Nobody."

Henry and Namath became good friends shortly after that experience. Joe was often invited to Henry's home in Selma for some Southern-fried chicken and Southern-style living. He picked up some of his drawl from being around Henry and his family.

"My family just adored him," said Henry. "He was always just the perfect gentleman."

Benny Marshall, sports editor of the *Birmingham News*, who followed Namath's career all through his Alabama days, was surprised when Namath broke down and cried at his press conference announcing his "retirement" at Bachelors III.

"In those early days at Alabama," said Marshall, "Joe was defiant. The crying seemed out of character. Joe seemed to be walking around then saying, 'I'll show them.' He never let the needling get under his hide."

Alabama was a fine team in 1961 as Joe played on the freshman team. The varsity ran through its schedule undefeated as Joe watched them. They were named the national champions in a final season poll.

In the spring of 1962, with varsity quarterback Pat Tramell, an All-American, and tackle Billy Neighbors graduated, the team was being rebuilt. Bryant, fresh from his first national championship at Alabama, was rebuilding around the kid from Pennsylvania. Namath had moved in with Henry, who was now a junior, and the two of them spent a great deal of time together.

"Joe was getting comfortable now. He started to like hanging around with the other jocks. He was honest. He would never be two-faced with anybody about anything," said Butch Henry. "If he liked you, you knew it. If he

didn't, you knew that too. He was the kind of guy who would be loyal, always, to a friend."

There was no question about Namath's ability as a college quarterback. He had won the first string quarterback job even before spring practice was a week old.

"He was such an impressive athlete," said Bryant, "that there was no doubting his skills. You didn't have to wait to see if he could do it in a game. He just looked like a natural leader. You knew he could do it in a game."

"He could play quarterback," said Butch Henry. "Anybody could see that."

Namath was winning friends and influencing people. He was being accepted by his schoolmates and his teammates. He had shown them he could play. They stopped calling him "toothpick" and they stopped calling him "nigger."

One afternoon Namath walked into a campus hangout called the Soup Shop. He spotted the jocks sitting in the back of the room, shifting in their chairs, killing time. Their trade was shown by their thick necks, compact builds and effortless movements. One of them was a basketball star who had left the university years before. He hung around as if he had a class coming up in five minutes.

Namath sat down, resting on his backbone, leaning back in his chair. The others nodded to him like gunfighters, no formal greeting necessary. This after all was Joe Namath, fellow jock.

The talk began with the latest sports results. Then it moved into another area, the jock's ability to flunk the simplest courses.

"Joe, didn't you flunk ROTC?"

"No, man, I knocked hell out of the exams. It was them itchy uniforms got me."

The gang laughed. Then a girl walked by, her skirt just tight enough, her bottom wiggling while she walked, her strawberry hair hanging loose over her shoulders. The bored ballplayers came alert and alive. "Hi, baby," said Namath. She did not answer. Her wiggle disappeared

cross the length of the room. Everybody laughed. Joe Namath had showed another area of his interests.

By September Namath had established his credentials as a football player. He had been excellent in the spring and now as the team gathered in the hot summer for its early training, Namath had established himself as the Crimson Tide's regular quarterback.

"He was a sophomore but he had a lot of game experience," said Bryant. "He had played football since he was eight and he had been a high school star. He had the equipment. I wasn't afraid because he was only a sophomore. The other teams had sophomores too."

None had a sophomore like Namath. He was thrown right into a ticklish situation and he performed, as Bryant said, "like a champion." Alabama had been the national champion in 1961. Namath had to lead a team that had wept through its schedule undefeated, untied and untested. They had to do something like that again.

Namath swept the Tide through its ten-game regular season schedule with a single loss, a heartbreaking 7-6 defeat at the hands of a fired-up Georgia Tech side. The defeat was Alabama's first in 27 games and the depression at Tuscaloosa was deep. The townfolk take their football seriously and there were whisperings that maybe the Yankee quarterback wasn't quite what he was made out to be. Namath quieted down a lot of the malcontents in January when he led Alabama to a victory over Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl, 17-0.

Namath, who was a flashy runner before the old knee bugaboo did him in, collected 252 yards on 91 tries. He scored four touchdowns rushing and averaged 2.8 yards.

"We didn't want him to run too much," said Bryant. "We wanted to protect that arm."

His passing credentials were impressive. He threw 163 passes, completed 85, had only nine intercepted, registered 1,278 yards in the air, had 13 touchdowns, averaged 62.2 per cent on his tries, and accumulated 1,530 yards total offense in Alabama's 10-1 season. The results had lived up to the predictions.

"He was a terrific quarterback," said Bryant. "He called good games and threw the football exceptionally

well. His quick release was what got them. I guess that's what they are still talking about in the pros."

Namath's junior year at Alabama was half fact, half fiction. It is hard to distinguish what from what. It began on a sour note and ended on a sour note. In between, there were All-America nominations.

During spring practice one afternoon, Namath was driving from Birmingham to Tuscaloosa on a rain-slick highway. He was driving too fast and all of a sudden he was skidding, sliding, coming to rest against a tree. Coach Bryant was called first. An ambulance was called second. Coach Bryant beat the ambulance to the hospital. Namath suffered a slight wound in his forehead from all this and began earning his 1963 headlines.

Alabama won three straight games over Georgia, Tulane and Vanderbilt. Then Florida beat them, 10-6. As always, the Alabama folk responded in typical fashion. They wanted to tar and feather Namath and send him bareback across the Mason-Dixon line. Rumors, some of which were printed in the local papers, blamed the loss on Namath's "late-night night club fight with fullback Mike Fracchia." The fight was reported to have occurred in six different night spots and at a time when Namath and Fracchia were asleep in a motel where Bryant took his team the night before a home game.

Benny Marshall, the Birmingham sports editor, said, "There mightn't be six night clubs in all of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama."

Because of his reputation, even starting in college, everything Namath did was big news. Even if it wasn't "Joe" Namath. One game weekend, a cousin of Joe's drove to Tuscaloosa for a game. A young lawyer saw the name Namath on the police blotter after the cousin had been arrested for a traffic violation. The morning news reported that Namath was in trouble with the cops.

Namath was reported seen in every bar in the state. He was reported drinking on and off the field. Townfolk were locking up their daughters when his name was mentioned.

Everybody believed all this except the people who knew him. "My mother just loved him," said Butch Henry. "You would think he was the greatest Southern gentle-

man you ever saw when he would yes-ma'am her and no-ma'am her."

It really hit the fan when Alabama lost to its cross-state rival Auburn for the first time since 1958. Namath had a fumble which stopped what looked like the winning scoring drive. Now the Alabamians were after him for his on-field performance as well as his off-field conduct. They quickly forgot his touchdown passes and concentrated on his fumble.

Two games remained in the 1963 Alabama season. Joe wouldn't make them.

The first game was with Miami. It was originally scheduled before the usual season-ending game with Auburn. But it had been set back to accommodate national television, which needed a game the following week. It was to be played November 23, 1963.

On November 22, 1963, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot to death in Dallas, Texas.

The Miami game was put off. It couldn't be played the next Saturday, November 30, because Army-Navy was being played then on national television after a high level military decision. So Alabama was to meet Miami on December 7 and play Mississippi in the Sugar Bowl on January 1, 1964.

On Saturday night, with no game, Namath and a few friends went into town. They stopped at a couple of places and drank some beer. They came out, piled into a jeep that one of the players had, and opened a sixpack. An unidentified faculty member spotted Namath. Everybody knew him. The professor did not know the other players. One of them, also a star on the team, was sitting in the driver's seat with a beer can in his hand. He was not involved.

The faculty member rushed home, called Bryant, and reported the incident. Bryant was distraught. He promised he would investigate.

"It wasn't that big a deal," said Butch Henry, who was not there that night. "The non-athletes would go into town, get crazy mad drunk, really kick it out on a Saturday night and nobody would care. But let an athlete get caught having a beer and the world fell in. It really got

blown up because it was Joe. Everything Joe did, from shine his shoes to walk across the street, was big news. bet he didn't have half the beer that some of the non-athletes had in town that night."

On Sunday morning, Bryant called his assistant coaches to his quarters. He asked them if they knew anything about Joe's drinking. None of them had heard a word about it. Bryant went to the dormitory dining room. Namath was there. Bryant invited Namath over to finish his breakfast with him. Then he asked Joe to follow him upstairs to Bryant's office.

"It was routine talk," said Namath. "I didn't think anything special was on his mind."

"Shut the door, Joe."

"Yessir," said Namath.

"Joe, I have been told you were out in town drinking Saturday night. Is it true?"

Namath was stunned. He didn't flinch. "It's true, Coach."

"You are suspended from the team. Get in touch with Coach Bailey and he'll help you find a place to stay. You can't live here anymore. If you come back, that's up to you this spring."

Namath walked out of the door, his head spinning from the rapid developments. His whole life, not just the last two games of the Alabama season, hung suspended.

Bryant sent for his staff and told them what he had heard about Namath. He did not tell them what he had decided. He asked their advice on the matter. All of them, with the exception of George Stallings, now coaching at Texas A and M, pleaded for leniency on the coach's part. After all, most of them had taken a few drinks when they had played. Most of them knew the kids did. "If it had been me as a player," said Stallings, "you'd have fired me, Coach." That was Stallings' way of saying Bryant had built his team, developed rapport with them, and won football games from every player's contribution by treating them equally.

"The one thing we knew about Coach Bryant," said Butch Henry, "was that he was fair to all. He didn't care if you were a star like Joe or just a scrub. If you were a

member of the varsity, everything would be the same. Joe even got the same amount of tickets to sell as everybody else."

A couple of hours passed. Bryant thought again about his decision. He called his coaches together. This time he asked them to bring Namath with them.

"Joe," he said, "the only way you could stay on this squad would be for me to quit."

"I don't want that, Coach," Namath said.

"Then the matter is closed."

Bryant looks back on the suspension and takes the blame for the whole situation himself.

"If I did a better job with him, if I kept a better watch on him, if I was doing a good job of supervising, it never would have happened."

Bryant feels that he lost his star quarterback not because Joe was drinking beer but because he was drinking beer where somebody could see. "It's a small college town," Bryant said. "There's no way of hiding things like that when you are off the campus."

Namath was with five of his teammates. None of them ever came forward to announce their names. To this day, Bryant does not know. Only Namath and the five of them know who they are.

"When I heard about the Bachelors III thing," said Henry, "I thought about this. Loyalty to his friends has always been one of Joe's strongest traits."

After the matter was settled, Bryant went to the telephone and phoned Joe's mother in Beaver Falls. He wanted her to know about it before the newsmen began asking her about it. She cried bitterly at the call and asked Bryant to change his mind.

The next day Bryant received a telegram from Beaver Falls with several thousand signatures. They were asking Bryant to relent, to give Joe another chance, to forgive and forget for the good of Joe Namath, the team, Beaver Falls, Mrs. Namath, all the world. It was the most emotional appeal for leniency since Clarence Darrow begged for the lives of Leopold and Loeb. Bryant would not be moved.

He knew one thing: Joe Namath would move on from

Alabama in another year. Bryant would not. He had to live in the town, face those people, accept their rules. If they had deemed that a football player caught drinking in town was committing a sin, so be it. If Bear Bryant could fire Joe Namath, he was a pretty big man. It would not hurt Bear's chances in Alabama for the presidency. It could be that the fellow who nominated him in Chicago might have been watching Bear's performance with Joe Namath that day.

It was some years before Namath was willing to talk about the suspension. He was bitter at the time, less bitter and more realistic as time healed the wound.

"I was wrong, sure," said Joe, "but I wasn't that wrong. There were people drinking all over the place and they weren't getting suspended. There were nineteen different things I was going to do. I would show them all. I would leave school and play someplace else. I would never come back. I would run off to Canada and play. I sat there in my room with Butch Henry and we talked and talked and talked. He was very helpful. He pointed out to me that a lot of people were involved, not just me. My family and friends and Coach Bryant and my teammates, just everybody. You just can't go off in your own direction."

Namath was upset but not too upset to listen to reason. "We talked," said Henry, "and Joe cooled off. He knew he hadn't committed that serious a crime. Still, that's the way the rules were. He had to live with them."

Joe's 1963 season was finished. He had played in nine games (Alabama won all but one), rushed for 211 yards, passed for 765 yards, thrown eight touchdown passes, scored four more touchdowns himself, and made most of the All-American teams.

Mike Stuart, the director of sports information at Alabama, said Namath's school records were pretty impressive without any help.

"Anyway, the more he does in the pros," the publicist said, "the more people like to say he did in college."

Namath missed seeing the Miami game but he did make the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans. He hitchhiked from Tuscaloosa, bought a ticket and sat way up in the top of the stands. Alabama, with sophomore Steve Sloan

playing quarterback, beat Mississippi, 12-7 on four field goals by kicker Tim Davis.

Namath made his way down the stands into the runway near the locker room. He stood outside for a moment, not knowing if he was allowed in. The kids inside were screaming and shouting with joy after finishing a wonderful season. The door opened as one of the players came out and somebody spotted Joe.

"Joe, Joe, c'mon in. Hey, guys, Joe's here. How the hell are you?"

People outside the locker room spotted him and began yelling. "Hang in there, kid. You'll be back. You're the greatest."

Namath had gained the sympathy of the Alabama fans. Hardly a man is now alive who had not allowed the sin of beer to cross his lips. They felt the punishment was severe. Some even cried as Namath pushed his way past them into the dressing room. They fought each other for a chance to touch his broad back. Hero worship can go to a young man's head quickly. No one in Alabama, save the mature Bryant, had ever been pawed over that affectionately. Namath would never forget his people. He would dedicate his Southern drawl to them.

Bryant was now certain that Namath would toe the mark and be back on the team in the following season. The war between the American and National Football Leagues was heating up and Bryant saw the possibilities.

"If you play like you can in your last season, you'll get the biggest pro contract anybody got."

Bryant knew that Namath was superstar potential. He had the arm. He had the heart. He had the size at 6-2 and 195 pounds. He had the attention of the press. All he had to do was stay alive in 1964.

During the Christmas vacation Namath decided to go to California and watch the Jets play a game against Oakland.

"He paid his own way," said Weeb Ewbank. "He didn't want to get involved in any eligibility problems. Chuck Knox invited him to come. He brought him down before the game. I knew who he was. We had heard about him. Everybody hears about quarterbacks."

Namath was an NFL fan, but he wanted to see what the AFL game was all about. He had decided to go back and play at Alabama in 1964, and after that, he would listen to pro offers.

The 1964 season started off well. Alabama, with Namath back on the team, beat Tulane and Vanderbilt. Then came an easy game against North Carolina State. It was the most significant game of Namath's college career.

He headed wide on an option play, went toward the line after faking the pass, cut sharply . . . and went down quickly as his right knee gave out.

"Nobody was near him," said Bryant. "Nobody touched him. He just went down. He looked very badly hurt."

Steve Sloan came in and finished the win. For the rest of the season Namath was hobbled by the bad right knee. Still he helped Alabama win ten games, finish first in the nation again, and win a bid to the first night game in Orange Bowl history, January 1, 1965.

Sonny Werblin and Weeb Ewbank were in the stands that night. Bryant had given Werblin permission to talk about a pro contract in a very casual way with Namath. They were still worried about eligibility problems. The bidding was hot and heavy. Werblin wanted Joe for the Jets, and the St. Louis Cardinals in the NFL were fighting just as hard.

"Sloan will start in the Orange Bowl," announced Bryant. Werblin gulped hard. He wanted to sign Namath, but he also wanted the national television exposure. He wanted a star that everybody knew.

Namath was jogging around the Miami ball park four days before the game when the knee went again. Sloan would start. It was doubtful if Namath would play at all. "I'll play," Namath told trainer Jim Goostree.

And how! Sloan started the game; got in trouble early. Texas was ahead 14-0 early in the second quarter when Namath made his first appearance. He passed Alabama to a touchdown. Now it was 14-7. Texas scored again to make it 21-7. Namath came back and passed for another touchdown to make it 21-14. Then a field goal by Alabama as the Tide moved into the fourth quarter. The

score was 21-17 for Texas. Namath got the ball back with less than a minute to go. He passed down field. He brought the ball to the ten. Then a first down on the Texas six. The clock running. The crowd screaming. Werblin sweating. Namath cool. Steve Bowman, the full-back, drove to the two. Bowman, in two more tries, got the football to the two-foot line. Seven seconds remained. Who would make the fourth down touchdown try?

Namath called his own number. It was the gutsy call. On one leg, he smashed the center of the Texas line. Bodies piled up. The referees pulled them off. Namath lay on the bottom of the pile. They pulled the ball from him, checked the end zone stripe and motioned with their hands that Namath was short of the goal. It was a crushing defeat, 21-17, for Alabama and Joe Namath in his last college game.

Namath had put on a spectacular show. He had been everything Werblin could have wanted. He had passed for 255 yards, been named the game's most valuable player and excited all the television public. Still, Namath was unhappy at losing.

The next morning in the Harbor Inn Hotel in Miami Joe Willie Namath would get four hundred thousand big reasons not to be unhappy.

4

SONNY, LIKE IN MONEY

To many of the sports fans around New York City in the early part of 1960, the name Harry Wismer conjured up some strange memories. Wasn't he the fellow who broadcast football games and pioneered the 55-yard-line by announcing that a streaking broken-field runner had raced "to the 40, to the 45, to the 50, to the 55"? The very same. Wasn't he the fellow who started his career as a spotter for Bill Stern, married into the Ford family, became involved in broadcasting in a big way in Detroit and moved on to Washington to broadcast the Redskin games? That he was. And wasn't he the fellow who was

named one of the Outstanding Young Men in America in 1946 along with a relatively unknown congressman from Massachusetts named John Fitzgerald Kennedy? That was old Harry.

Wisner was a loquacious, gregarious guy who spent much of his time on the air telling the radio audience that his good friend Harry Truman or his good friend Humphrey Bogart or his good friend Babe Ruth or his good friend Ernest Hemingway had just come up to the radio booth to say hello, when in fact they were known to him only in his dreams, and usually, at the moment he spotted them, they were halfway around the world.

Wisner had a friendly, round face, a booming voice, a handsome smile and a hustler's heart. "Congratulations," he bellowed on meeting anybody. The receiver of this greeting would be thrilled. My God, old Harry already knows I have been promoted to chief cook and bottle washer. "People are always doing something," Harry once explained. "If you congratulate them they will feel excited and immediately tell you what you are congratulating them for. It's much better than saying hello."

The mind boggles at what might have been if Harry Wisner and Joe Namath had been wed in a football marriage. It was never to be, of course, but oh what fun it might have been.

Late in 1959, Lamar Hunt of Dallas, son of one of the world's richest men, H. L. Hunt, the defender of so many right-wing causes, had given up the idea of crashing into the old, established order of the National Football League. Hunt wanted a franchise for Dallas and had worked closely with Bert Bell, the commissioner, toward that end. Since the rich, selfish men who ran the NFL refused to share the pie, Hunt was always turned away with vague promises about next week, next month, next year. When Bert Bell died, Hunt knew he was licked. He gave up the idea of gaining an NFL franchise and set out to establish his own league. He was joined by oil magnate Bud Adams of Houston. They enlisted several others, including Harry Wisner, who had a fondness for football and a passion for promotion, in their new venture. After

a meeting in Wismer's New York apartment in the fall of 1959, they announced the forming of the American Football League. The owners of the new franchises were quickly dubbed the "Foolish Club." They would struggle, they would battle, they would survive. The "Foolish Club" would someday own Joe Namath and who would be foolish then?

Wismer named his franchise in New York the Titans. They would play in the dreary remains of the New York Giants baseball field, the Polo Grounds, left free since the Giants departure to San Francisco after the 1957 season.

Wismer ran his team out of his hat. His ticket office, publicity office, team headquarters, complaint office and pay office, all were located in his living room. A prospective ticket buyer for a Titans game would be greeted by a suspicious Swedish maid who would charm visitors with a bellowing, "Vat you Vant?" After that, few people would vant much.

It was not to say that Wismer ran the team strictly to get his name in the papers. Sometimes it was to get his picture in the papers. One day he received a wire from the publicity man of the San Diego Chargers. "Please send head shots of Titans players for publicity purposes prior to our game next Sunday." Wismer immediately dispatched one hundred glossy photographs of a smiling Harry Wismer to the San Diego office.

The Titans, despite Wismer's efforts, were a competitive team in their early years. They were 7-7 in 1960, 7-7 again in 1961, and 5-9 in 1962. The stars included a bald-headed quarterback named Al Dorow, who made up plays in the huddle; end Art Powell, who wanted every pass thrown to him whether he caught it or not; Don Maynard, a free-wheeling, non-pattern running end; and Billy Mathis, Larry Grantham and Dainard Paulson, who all survived until the Jets were born.

Wismer had two major accomplishments before he was to go under. First, he negotiated a spectacular television contract with the American Broadcasting Company, which merely saved the league. Second, he got enough publicity for his team to save the franchise.

Wisner's publicity often came in strange ways. It was often by accident. One of his best moves was in grabbing the press box microphone himself in an icy-cold stadium and announcing to the overcoated writers, "Today's attendance is 20,898; congratulations; Harry." Harry was only exaggerating by some 19,000. Sportswriter Warren Pack of the *Journal-American* wrote, "Wisner announced the crowd as 20,898 today. Of this total, 19,000 came disguised as empty seats."

While the franchise staggered, Wisner fought with his coaches, Slinging Sammy Baugh of Washington Redskin fame, and later Clyde (Bulldog) Turner of Chicago Bears fame. Harry managed to be on the field during games and would substitute players while the coach was substituting others. It became quite hectic.

Just before the opening game of the 1962 season against Oakland in California, Wisner announced that the Titans had acquired Lee Grosscup. This was going to save the franchise again once and for all.

Grosscup, handsome, articulate, suave, was a writer, lecturer and bon vivant, as well as a quarterback. He looked like a Frank Merriwell type, blond hair, blue eyes, golden arm. He had played with the Giants, antagonized his mates with an article before he had ever joined them, was working on a book before he had passed in a game, and had been treated shabbily. The Giants football players—schooled in the keep-your-mouth-shut-school—made him miserable. They rarely talked to him. They needled him. They thought little of his ability and the few times he did get into a game, they just managed to let a few charging linemen through to hush his mouth. Grosscup's crime was that he was unlike most football players. He thought the head was to be used for something other than holding up your helmet. He had failed at Minnesota, been dropped, and then signed with Wismer.

In his first pass for the Titans he threw a super bomb downfield to Don Maynard for an eighty-yard touchdown. Was it to be a new era? It lasted one more game. Then Grosscup was crushed between two charging line-

men, his knee ligaments were torn and Wismer's dream was almost over.

In a way, Lee Grosscup was the forerunner of Joe Namath. He could have been something and been somebody. He needed a little more time and a little more talent.

After Grosscup's demise, the franchise began to slip away. Wismer's checks began bouncing. They began bouncing on the players.

"I would always tell my wife to cash Harry's checks in a different store each week," said Larry Grantham. "I wouldn't want the same fellow to get stuck."

The checks would bounce; Harry would write new checks; those would be good; and then the next week's checks would bounce again. The whole process would be repeated most of the year.

The players continued to do their best, despite this turmoil. It proved they had the amateur spirit after all. The situation really came to a head one afternoon after a spirited practice. The players marched into the clubhouse for showers. There was no hot water. Harry had forgotten to pay the help and they had forgotten to turn it on.

On November 8, 1962, Commissioner Joe Foss announced that the American Football League was assuming the financial responsibilities of the Titans. Foss flew across the country trying to find a prospective buyer. Wismer threatened to get the club back by finding an angel. Each day, Wismer would wake one sportswriter or another with a three-o'clock-in-the-morning call.

"Congratulations, I've sold the club to..." Then he would begin talking about everything but the sale. The clicks would not stop Harry from talking.

He was up against a financial brick wall. But he wanted so badly to stay. The league was actually becoming a serious organization. Several franchises were doing well. And in New York, Harry dreamed of leading his team into Shea Stadium, onward and upward to greater glory. He could not make it. He finally had to file for bankruptcy. Harry Wismer died four years later without

a ball club, but on his tombstone they should have written, "Congratulations, Harry, for without you there would not have been an AFL, a New York franchise, and heaven forbid, a Joe Namath."

After taking over the franchise from Wismer, Foss spent much of his time crossing the country. He was rarely at his desk as he worked hard to restructure the Titans and get the New York franchise on solid financial footing. One day he called his office from Los Angeles, "Any messages," he asked his secretary. "Yes," she said, "would you please call a Sonny Werblin in New York."

David A. (Sonny) Werblin, a smooth-talking, smiling, friendly man, who had been born fifty-five years earlier on St. Patrick's Day in Brooklyn, N.Y., and had played football as an undersized guard at James Madison High and Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., had become interested in the possibilities of the Titans. He was a New Yorker who had always liked football. He was president of the Music Corporation of America. He saw the enormous potential of a football franchise playing out of Shea Stadium. The Mets were to open there in the spring of 1964. The football team would follow in the fall. It was the kind of deal Werblin loved. He would take a dead act and make it a star.

On March 28, 1963, David A. Werblin became president of a new syndicate which purchased the New York franchise from the league.

"We didn't buy the Titans," Werblin said. "We just paid a million dollars to the league for the franchise. They took the money and paid off the debts. We were free and clear."

Werblin's moves were almost always brilliant. His first move was to quickly change the name of the football team. The Titans were dead. R.I.P. The new team was to be known as the Jets, to be confused hopefully with the Mets, and to capture some of the fans, the attention and the goodwill that Casey Stengel had generated for the team.

Werblin resigned from MCA to assume full management responsibilities with the Jets. *Variety* wrote of him

when he quit after thirty-five years with MCA, "No one had better contacts, knew more secrets, swapped more information, flew so many airline miles, ate more meals at "21," made more deals, or sold so many hundreds of millions of dollars worth of programming."

Werblin had started as an office boy with the company, became a band boy in the big band era, ran sandwiches for the stars, married singer Leah Rae and worked his way up the corporate ladder to the top. All the show business people that Harry Wismer used to brag were his friends, were in fact, Sonny Werblin's friends.

Werblin had some vague interest in becoming part of the Mets when Joan Payson bought the club. It never got off the ground but Sonny's circle widened to include sports-minded people. Werblin had been active with Monmouth Race Track in New Jersey and had many sports contacts through that operation.

When he heard about the Titans being available he formed a package with Donald C. Lillis, a Wall Street man; Townsend Martin, thoroughbred breeder; Philip H. Selin, businessman and horseman; and Leon Hess, oilman, to buy the club. They would put up their money with his to purchase the team but he was to run it.

Werblin showed that he knew what the most important aspect of a winning sports operation was. His first move was to hire Joe Cahill, a very likable publicity man from West Point, who had glorified the deeds of Glenn Davis, Doc Blanchard, Arnold Galiffa and other All-Americans, and see if he get the same attention for his Jets players.

Werblin cleaned out the old Titans crew. He saved only George Sauer, the former All-American player and excellent coach, who was working as Wismer's general manager. Sauer, alone of the old crew, stayed. He was to do some yeoman work for the Jets; was very influential in the scouting and signing of Namath and helped the Jets land his own son, George Sauer, Jr., who was to become an integral part of the 1968 championship team.

Werblin announced to the press that he would hire the best football coach in the country. Names like Earl

Blaik, Frank Leahy, Bud Wilkinson, and several others were thrown around. The speculation continued for several weeks. Finally the name of Wilbur (Weeb) Ewbank got into the picture.

Ewbank had coached the Baltimore Colts from 1954 until 1962. He had built the team from nothing to a contender. In 1958 and 1959, with the great Johnny Unitas at quarterback, he had won the NFL championship with two brilliant victories over the New York Giants, the first in overtime in "the greatest game ever played." The Colts slumped in 1961 and 1962 and a player rebellion led to Weeb's demise after the 1962 season. He was, as Sonny Werblin would say, at liberty and in between engagements in 1963. Werblin knew that Weeb's fame as the leader of the Colts, especially because of his two wins over the Giants, would help in New York. He hired him as coach and general manager.

There were few quality players around. Ewbank shuffled, juggled, maneuvered. He protected his quarterback Dick Woods, a bad knee type, as much as he could, and the Jets actually won five games.

What was more important, the battle between the leagues, and the money involved, was heating up. When Joe Namath was suspended from the Alabama football team late in 1963, he had plenty of time to read about this competition. And the big money.

Werblin loosened his pocketbook for the first time in the early part of 1964 to sign Matt Snell, the husky fullback from Woody Hayes' fine Ohio State football team. It broke the log jam. The old Titans had rarely signed a quality player. Once in a while they got lucky with somebody like Mathis or Grantham, but the good ones disappeared into the NFL. Now Werblin had a good one in Snell.

"I signed with the Jets," explained the Negro fullback "because Mr. Werblin took the time to come out here and talk to me personally. The Giants never did that."

Werblin camped in Snell's Ohio State room and got his signature while the scout for the Giants sat downstairs in the dormitory waiting for Snell to appear.

"I've got a formula," Werblin said, "that we have worked out with our tax people on the bonus agreements. It allows the players to be paid over a long period of time and to keep more of their money."

Snell got \$100,000 over three years and Sonny had his first nationally known college player for the Jets.

The 1964 season really put Werblin in business. His promotion efforts, his parties, his availability to the press, his new, aggressive style was selling his team to the fans. The Jets were now playing in Shea Stadium and Jets tickets were becoming a status thing. It was fun to be a Jets fan and Werblin exploited it.

Dorothy Kilgallen began mentioning the team in her gossip columns, and other prominent show business personalities, often friends of Sonny, began talking about the Jets. Johnny Carson worked out with them one day. The Jets were becoming closer and closer to becoming a star.

"Show business operates on the star system," said Werblin. "That's what fills a theatre."

Werblin knew that sports was really show business. The Jets were drawing three times as many fans at Shea as the Titans had in the Polo Grounds, but they didn't have a star. Their best known player was linebacker Yahoo McDaniel, but even the average fan knew he was more promotion than production. A star, a star, Sonny would give his kingdom for a star.

Late in 1963, when Namath was suspended from Alabama, Chuck Knox was talking to Ewbank. Knox, who had coached in Western Pennsylvania when Namath was doing it all at Beaver Falls, pointed out that if Namath didn't go back to school in 1964 the Jets should keep their eye on him.

"He's a good one," said Knox. "He has great release, real fine football player."

Ewbank took the message back to Sonny Werblin. Werblin began watching Joe's career as he finished the 1963 season out of action. Namath came out to the Jets camp on the coast and Weeb, Werblin, Knox and Namath had a casual conversation. Namath said he was in-

terested in playing professional football. He said he had hopes of returning to school for his senior year.

Ewbank spent much of the early part of 1964 watching football films. Some of the films were of his opposing teams in the AFL. Other films, shipped to him by the coaches, were of outstanding prospects for professional football across the country. Namath looked wonderful on film.

"You could see the kind of player he was without seeing him in person," said Ewbank. "There was something about the way he ran a game or threw a ball. He had it. There was no question about that."

The Jets also were watching John Huarte, the quarterback of Notre Dame. They liked the attention he was getting in the press, but they weren't too happy with his sidearm throws, his small size and his lack of speed. He didn't seem like the kind Werblin wanted.

Namath was injured in the North Carolina State game. Werblin wondered about signing him now. He was assured by the people at Alabama and by Dr. James Nicholas that corrective surgery would cure Namath's problems.

The war between the leagues was boiling. When the 1964 season ended, players were being secreted away in motels all across America so the other league couldn't get to them. They were wined and dined. Money flew freely. The "amateur" players, still not finished with their college careers, were taking handouts. Some were signing with the teams they took money from. Others didn't. It was maddening to the losers. Some teams and some scouts, who got percentages of a deal in signing a highly rated player, offered what they thought the boy wanted. It included booze and broads as well as money. Some young college things worked the signing circuit, making their charms available to the pro scouts for a price to "baby sit" with their prospects.

Joe Namath, who had no trouble in finding his own girls, never was involved with any of this.

"I'll tell you one thing," said Weeb Ewbank, "until the moment we signed Joe, we had not bought him a

oke. One day Sonny and I went to dinner with him. He wouldn't let us buy. He fought us until we agreed to let him pick up his share of the check."

When the regular season ended, Namath still was an amateur. He wouldn't sign a pro contract until after the Orange Bowl in Miami on January 1, 1965. The Jets, in the meantime, were having trouble. They had drafted Tom Nowatzke, a bruising fullback from Indiana, but he had signed with the Detroit Lions. They had the draft rights to Namath, but couldn't sign him until after the Orange Bowl. They signed Verlon Biggs, a 250-pound tackle from Jackson State but nobody had heard of either Biggs or Jackson State. They signed Princeton's Cosmo Cavazzi, who was a good Ivy League player, but obviously didn't have the speed or size for the pros. So far, Werblin had only made gestures.

The Houston Oilers had originally drafted Namath. They traded the draft rights to the Jets in exchange for Jerry Rhyme, a Texan.

"Joe had expressed a strong interest in playing in New York," said Weeb. "That was one of the reasons we thought we could get him."

Both St. Louis and the Jets realized that the quickest way to Namath's heart was through his coach, Bear Bryant.

"I talked to some of the people in the early stages," said Bryant, "but when the money started moving up and up, I got out. That was Joe's life and it was certainly up to Joe."

"When the money started getting too high for me to understand," said Namath, "I went out and played golf and let Mike Bite handle it."

Werblin and Namath met several times during the week before the Orange Bowl. Sonny made it clear he would match or top any offer the St. Louis Cardinals would make.

"I have always been an NFL fan," Namath told Werblin. "I just think I would like to try myself against the better league."

"You," said Werblin, "will make the AFL a better league."

Namath told the Cardinals he liked their offer. He told them he liked their league. He told them he didn't like the idea of playing in St. Louis. He still had an idea New York would be his kind of town. Werblin encouraged and fostered the idea. He told Namath about the bright lights and the beautiful girls. He told Namath he would be a star in New York and that a star in New York would have the big city at his fingertips. Then came the bombshell.

"We would like to have you very much in our league," said the man from the Cardinals. "If you won't play with us, maybe you will play with the New York Giants."

That was almost too much for Namath. He began to weaken. If that could be arranged, he would probably sign with the NFL. While Mike Bite, Namath's lawyer worked with the Cardinals and the Jets in moving the price upward, Namath got ready for the Orange Bowl.

Three days before the Orange Bowl game a Miami paper broke the story. They said that Namath had finally agreed to sign with the Jets instead of the Cardinals. He was going with Sonny Werblin. He would sign as soon as he finished his work for Alabama in the Orange Bowl.

The figure that had swayed Namath was reported to be **FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.**

No amount of money like that had ever been given to any athlete for his signature. It was the most incredible story anybody had ever heard. That was more than the payroll of most of the clubs in the AFL and the NFL.

Since Namath was still an amateur, and since the Orange Bowl had to be played, neither Namath nor Werblin would confirm or deny the story.

"I have spoken to Mr. Werblin," said Namath. "I haven't signed anything."

"We feel we have a very good chance," said Werblin.

"I'm sure Joe will sign a very lucrative contract," said Mike Bite.

The night before the Orange Bowl game, Werblin had dinner with Namath. When the dinner was over, Namath

had agreed to sign with the Jets. He would put his signature on a contract the next day.

Werblin was besieged by the press at the Orange Bowl before the game. Was the \$400,000 figure really accurate? Would Namath be receiving it in cash? Was any football player worth that much money? Sonny did a lot of smiling and very little answering. He knew he had his man. Now was the time to stretch out the show, build it, create some excitement and get his money's worth in space in the newspapers and on television. Werblin made a good show of denying that he had ever specifically announced to anybody that \$400,000 was really the figure being mentioned.

"He's a fine football player," said Werblin. "It costs a lot of money to sign fine football players."

Most of the early stories before the Orange Bowl included some statement to the fact that Namath was expected to sign a \$400,000 bonus contract immediately after the game. Nobody confirmed it. Nobody, more importantly, denied it. Namath and Werblin spent most of the early morning smiling.

It is to Sonny's credit that he could stay calm that night as Namath performed his heroics in almost catching Texas single-handedly. It is to Namath's credit that he would dive into the middle of the huge Texas line knowing that a broken leg might cost him an awful lot of money.

As the game ended and the fans poured onto the field, Werblin poured on with them. He caught Joe at the middle of the bench, leaned over, whispered something to him, pulled a document from his side pocket, pulled a pen from his inside pocket, and sat down on the bench with Namath. The quarterback of the Alabama Crimson Tide was dirty with mud and sweat. Werblin hardly cared. He watched Namath scribble his name on the contract. Sonny Werblin, the seeker of stars, had the biggest one in his glorious career.

Most of the stories from the Orange Bowl concerned the signing of Namath. The game was almost forgotten in the confusion of the huge bonus. Football owners and fans all across the country reeled at the thought of the

kind of money that might be passing hands to sign football players.

There has never been an official breakdown of the famous \$400,000. Dick Young in the New York *Daily News*, came closest to examining the figures in his column one day. His total only came to \$389,000 but "\$400,000 quarterback" had more ring. Namath was supposed to have received \$300,000 just for signing his name to a contract agreeing to play for the Jets for the next four years. He was to be paid \$25,000 a year in salary for a total of \$375,000. The rest of the money came from a car given him by the Jets, insurance policy and other investment credits. Two of Namath's brothers were given cash payments in return for some vague scouting duties.

How did Sonny really land Namath?

"I just liked him," said Namath. "He was honest, he was fair, he just seemed like the kind of man I wanted to work for."

Werblin appreciates the fact that his own show business background was a factor in luring Namath to New York. He had explained to him the benefits a star athlete in New York might reap. More than anything, the chemistry between Werblin and Namath, the producer and the star, made the match. Namath had a head full of wild and wonderful ideas. Werblin convinced him they were all true.

Why was Sonny willing to spend that much money for a football player? The one thing Werblin needed was attention. He was battling the NFL and he was battling the Giants. He had to turn the town on to the Jets. Only a superstar could do that. Only a superstar could hold the attention of the fans while Sonny busied himself in buying and building a real solid football team. Werblin was sure Namath was a star.

"He had a certain excitement about him," said Werblin. "The first time I talked to him I knew the boy was something special. He had it the way the show business stars have it. He walked into a room and the conversation stopped. He made people listen to him. He had charm and magnetism. In athletics, in show business, it's the

same. When the great ones appear, everybody knows it. Namath was a great one."

It was Werblin's contention from the beginning that he would be worth the \$400,000 even if he didn't make it as a player. He would cause comment and controversy. People would notice him, notice the Jets and fight each other for a place in Shea Stadium.

"I know the value of names," Werblin said. "Namath was a name. This would make him a bigger name. I didn't expect to lose money."

Werblin had negotiated some fabulous television deals for people like Ed Sullivan, Jackie Gleason, Andy Williams and hundreds of others. He appreciated the fact that talent could only carry a man so far. He needed that talent known to the fans. He needed that talent recognized. The \$400,000 he paid for Namath would guarantee that. Namath would be well known from that moment on.

The reaction to the signing was more than even Werblin could have hoped or expected. Several of the bigger names in the National Football League thought the figure was outrageous. Then, when they thought some more, they realized it might help them.

Dr. Frank Ryan, the quarterback of the Cleveland Browns, who held a Ph.D. in mathematics and passed the Browns to the NFL title, was one of Werblin's favorite people. He helped steamroll the publicity. A reporter asked Ryan if he resented the big bundle Namath got.

"If he got \$400,000," said Dr. Ryan, the eminent mathematician, "I'm worth a million."

Now the arguments filled the press. Was an untried rookie worth that much money? Would the established players take it lying down? What would happen to salary and bonuses after this?

Arthur Modell, the bright, articulate owner of the Cleveland Browns, spoke for all his fellow owners when he said, "This could ruin professional football."

The owners realized that if they had to pay \$400,000 bonuses for quarterbacks, maybe half that for running backs and a quarter of that for linemen, they would be

out of business in a year. The true impact of the Namath bonus was now being felt. The \$400,000 forced the NFL owners to realize that they could not go on endlessly in a money war with the AFL. The college boys would drain them all dry. The AFL owners were actually less upset than the NFL. They knew they had to pay money to make the club. They also were richer men.

A little more than a year after Joe Namath was signed by Sonny Werblin, the six-year war ended. The NFL and the AFL agreed to a football merger that would end competitive bidding for players. Another handful of players like Donnie Anderson and Jim Grabowski at Green Bay would get a bundle of money after Namath, but for most college boys it was over.

Namath's name became a part of American life. It was dropped into the most casual of conversations. It was used by businessmen to impress their clients. It was used by women to impress their husbands. It was used by all sorts of people to impress all sorts of other people about their knowledge of the hip, football scene. Bob Hope made it part of his television monologue.

"With that kind of salary," said Hope, "Joe Namath will be playing quarterback in a business suit."

A week after the Jets signed Namath to his \$400,000 contract, they signed John Huarte to a \$200,000 contract. Huarte wasn't worth the money. What Sonny had really done, in his own inimitable style, was create more Namath conversation. Joe Namath would be the only \$400,000 quarterback in history to have a \$200,000 benchwarmer backing him up.

The publicity immediately turned into ticket sales. This was what the publicity was really all about anyway. The Jets ticket office opened early and stayed late. The sales for the week after the Namath signing reached 2,800. By the middle of March, six months before Namath was to play for the Jets in his first game, Werblin announced that he had sold 35,000 season tickets. A year later he was to sell out his park. Namath had turned more people on to football than anybody had ever dreamed existed in New York. Very soon, Werblin

was watching crowds of 60,000 jam into Shea Stadium to watch Joe Namath's white shoes.

None of them came disguised as empty seats.

One of the fringe benefits of the Namath signing—and something Sonny Werblin counted on—was the built-in animosity toward the “other” team in town, the New York Giants. The Giants had the town to themselves for many years. They had won championships and developed a hard core following. The Giants always sold out, so they acted as if they didn't need the fans or the press. Suddenly, with Namath's appearance on the scene, the press didn't need them. The Giants were the Establishment team and suddenly nobody cared about the Establishment.

In one quick stroke, Werblin had used Namath to mollify several thousand fans who felt antagonistic to the Giants. Now nobody cared that the Giants were haughty and unfriendly. Nobody cared that their publicity man had an unlisted phone number. Nobody cared that requests for season tickets were met with icy condemnation. Joe Namath was in New York, and all of a sudden nobody cared about the Giants. The Giants fans were second bananas at the cocktail party league. The ones who got the attention were the guys who could proudly show their Jets tickets stubs.

Joe Namath was coming to town and that's what everybody was talking about. With one genius stroke, Sonny Werblin had pulled off the greatest public relations coup since the French persuaded Charles Lindbergh to land in Paris instead of London.

Werblin was to make a lot of money for the Jets, for Namath and for himself. But it was more than that. Werblin, who had spent his life as a promoter, had his greatest monument. This little fellow from Brooklyn, who had been a king-maker behind the scenes with his show biz crowd, was now a king-maker in front of the scenes. He had the hottest property in sports. They were beating a path to his door. He had built the better mouse trap. His handling of the Namath signing would go down in all the textbooks of public relations. He had realized the public's ultimate fascination toward huge sums of

money. No matter what Joe Namath would do on a football field, he would always be the quarterback who got \$400,000. No \$100-a-week laborer would ever forget that when he sat by his television set on a Sunday afternoon, guzzled his beer and experted the game.

Howard Cosell did a marvelous television special on Werblin a couple of years after the Namath signing. It had the ring of truth as it showed this very dynamic human being in action. The title had the ring of truth as well.

Cosell called it "Sonny Like In Money."

5

1965: THE YEAR OF THE KNEE

At eight o'clock in the morning of January 25, 1965, Dr. James A. Nicholas, orthopedic specialist at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan, scrubbed for another knee operation.

He had performed nearly a thousand knee operations in his career at Lenox Hill. Most of them were private matters between the patient, the doctor, and the immediate family. This one was to be important to Joe Namath, to Sonny Werblin, to Weeb Ewbank, to the football fans in New York and to all the owners, players and fans of the struggling American Football League.

Time and *Life* magazines had made serious bids to the hospital to photograph the knee operation. Unaware of the implications, or caring not a bit, the hospital had refused.

A hospital spokesman said, "We never allow any operations to be photographed unless there is a medical first, a discovery to be made that we want recorded. This would be done in something like brain surgery. If it was brain surgery we would probably allow some photographs."

Dr. Nicholas, who was a high school football player and served the Jets as their team doctor and orthopedic specialist, understood the magnitude of the operation

"I'm like a football player before a big game. I know I'd better have a good day," he kidded.

Namath was on the operating table. His right leg was exposed. The rest of his body was covered with a sheet. Three nurses and two other doctors assisted Dr. Nicholas.

Joe Namath's football future was in the hands of Dr. Nicholas.

Sonny Werblin and Weeb Ewbank sat outside the operating room. They paraded up and down like expectant fathers, smoked cigarettes, had nightmares about Namath never playing for them, sweated, strained, grew anxious, and finally collapsed into chairs thirty minutes before Dr. Nicholas came out of the operating room.

The man who had paid \$400,000 for a quarterback with a sore knee and was gambling his own money, reputation and his team's future on Dr. Nicholas's skilled hands puffed on a well-smoked cigarette. Werblin was more nervous than he had ever been. His friends and the press thought he was crazy for spending so much money on an untried college quarterback. They were convinced of his madness when Werblin had announced a week earlier, "Joe Namath needs a knee operation."

The announcement of the impending knee surgery took place in Toots Shor's midtown Manhattan restaurant. More than a hundred representatives of the press, radio and TV turned out to hear the news.

"Namath will undergo knee surgery on Monday," Werblin said. "Dr. Nicholas predicts a complete recovery."

Namath had trouble with his knee for two years in Alabama. After an examination by Dr. Nicholas, surgery was recommended. Namath needed to have torn cartilage in his right knee removed and ligaments tightened in his knee.

"He will probably have to wear a brace while playing," said Dr. Nicholas, "but it shouldn't hamper his mobility."

Werblin wasn't worried about that. Mickey Mantle had worn braces on his knees for years. Besides, Sonny knew, injured players are always making news. Reporters are

always asking, "How is he?" Whatever answer they get is worth a story.

In less than twenty days as a member of the Jets and with his first league game more than eight months away, Namath had already gotten more press coverage than all of the rest of the Jets and the old Titans combined in their five-year history.

Namath was quick and glib at the informal knee outing.

"Joe, c'mon," urged one reporter. "How much money did you really get?"

"I really don't know," he said. "Only my lawyer knows that and he hasn't told me."

Namath's lawyer, young Mike Bite, had negotiated the bonus deal. He was from a firm in Tuscaloosa named Bite, Bite and Bite.

"After the Namath deal," said Werblin, "they should have called the firm Bite, Bite and Bitten."

As reporters gathered around Namath for more information about his bonus and his knee, Namath eyed the grits on Toots Shor's table. There were hors d'oeuvres of every name, rank and serial number from breaded shrimp to meatballs to pigs in blankets to liver wrapped in bacon. It was the kind of spread that legend once said forced Jackie Gleason to send out for pizza.

"Hey, I'm hungry, I haven't had a thing all day. I gotta get something to eat. When do you guys let me eat?"

The reporters weren't about to let up that easily on Namath. They grilled him for more than an hour about his past, present and future. Their readers were hungry for his words. Sonny Werblin was just as hungry to have them read them. Namath was just hungry.

"Hey, pal, do me a favor," Namath said to a waiter, "bring me a ham sandwich."

Namath went into the hospital on Monday for the surgery. Dr. Nicholas came out at 10:15 and looked into Sonny Werblin's worried face.

"Everything went perfectly," he said. "The operation was a success."

Joe Cahill, the publicity man for the Jets, rushed off

to a telephone to call the news into the local papers and the wire services. The world could rest easier this night. Namath would be able to start earning some of that \$400,000 and New York Jets ticket holders still had a valuable ducat on their hands.

Namath had a couple of days in New York before he was due at the hospital. He wasn't about to waste them resting. He knew he would get plenty of rest after Monday's knee surgery.

He had dinner with Werblin in 21. Then he excused himself for some fun in New York. He hit a few places up town. Then he took a look at the Village. Then he got into the green Lincoln that Werblin had presented him with for signing and drove to a Third Avenue night spot called Dudes 'N' Dolls.

With a couple of buddies including Al Hassan, a bearded old friend from Beaver Falls and now business manager for Joe Willie Namath, Namath ordered a Grand Marnier on the rocks. Animated as always, talking with his hands flying, Namath tipped over the drink. For a moment nobody seemed to know what to do.

"Here, somebody," shouted Hassan, "clean up this mess. Somebody get Joe another drink."

"Hey, Miss America," Joe called to a waitress.

A young waitress in a black, skimpy costume wiggled over nervously. "The name's Barbara."

"Hey, get a load of that," Joe said. "She's Barbara. Give me another Grand Marnier on the rocks, Barbara. Give us another tablecloth. Give us another everything."

"Yeah, that's great, Joe," said Al Hassan. "Give us another everything."

The drinks came and Namath took a long swallow. Then the rock group playing the place gave out with the loud, pulsating, electronic music that Joe Willie Namath digs. He eyed two brunettes sitting at the table next to his. Joe got up, ambled over to the prettier of the two, touched her shoulder. "Hey, wanna dance?"

The girl walked to the floor with Namath behind her. She started slowly, then sent her hips and her chest bouncing in every direction all at once. Joe stayed right with her, snapping his fingers, shaking his pelvis like

Elvis, moving his shoulders. All eyes were on him, not the girl.

"Go, Joe baby, Go," Al Hassan yelled. "He's moving like he hasn't got a care in the world. Here he is about to go in the hospital and he's having a ball."

Namath took the girl back to her table. "What luck," he said. "That girl's made for me." Then, leaning over her shyly, he said, "If you would just write your address and phone number down here on my card, Debbie. . . ."

Each day in Lenox Hill, Namath squirmed in bed as reporters and photographers paid him a great deal of attention. The New York *Daily News* spread his leg full page across page one. They hadn't gotten that excited for a picture since they spread Ruth Snyder's electrocution quivers all over page one.

A week after the operation, Namath told reporters, "I'm going crazy here. I feel as if I could leave right now but the doctors won't let me."

Dr. Nicholas was in charge of the case and wanted to guarantee success. Werblin wasn't pushing him either. The publicity was enormous. Every football fan in the street became a knee surgeon.

"I remember the quarterback we had before," said one New York fan. "That was a guy named Dick Wood. He had six knee operations and he still couldn't throw. They should have operated on his arm."

Twelve days after the operation, Namath was released from the hospital. He was told to stay off the leg as much as possible for six weeks. Then he could begin light exercise. The Jets training camp in Peekskill, New York, was only six months away.

Namath left the hospital, and the nurses who had attended him were sorry to see him go.

"He's a dreamboat," said one. "He looks like Cary Grant and so much younger."

Namath had charmed everybody except the mail department of the hospital. In twelve days he had received more than a thousand pieces of mail. The people at Lenox Hill were glad to see that stop.

"The only problem," said a hospital spokesman, "was that it didn't stop for a month after Joe was gone. A

lot of people read that he was here but not as many read that he left."

The mail came from all over with a heavy supply from Alabama, where Joe had played, and Pennsylvania, where he was born, raised and gone to high school.

One girl wrote, "I used to be Beatle crazy. Now I'm Joe Namath crazy. If you don't marry me, I'll kill myself. If you can't marry me, just send me your autograph."

Another girl wrote: "I'm 19 years old, considered quite beautiful, have a marvelous figure and a nice personality. I am hereby inviting you to escort me to the Junior Prom of the University of Texas, all expenses paid. Daddy will fly you down and home in the company plane."

Namath wrote her, "That's sure a wonderful invitation. I can't make it, though. I already have a date that day."

Early in February Namath left New York and returned to the campus at the University of Alabama to complete his education and get his degree. He wasn't sure about his career except for football.

"I guess I could always teach and coach," he said. "Could you imagine me teaching anybody anything."

He spent a few weeks in Alabama and then moved on to Florida. He found Miami a little more invigorating to his new wealth. He was a regular visitor to the track at Hialeah, something Werblin could well understand. The Jets owner was a director at Monmouth Race Track in New Jersey, owner of several horses, and liked to place a few wagers himself.

Namath not only likes to bet on horses, he likes to ride them. He considered borrowing a pony and taking a few early morning runs at the track. He finally was talked out of it.

"I don't think Mr. Werblin would much go for that," Namath said, "if I hurt myself."

Namath spent a great deal of his time at Hialeah with his good friend, Joe Hirsch, the famed handicapper for *The Morning Telegraph*, who picks races but hardly ever bets them himself.

One day they were watching the Widener at Hialeah

and Namath made a bet and Hirsch made a bet. Then the race was run. Hirsch had a horse named Primordial. The horse came in first but there was an objection. While the stewards argued the question, Hirsch told Namath he would meet him outside at the car. He had to take care of some business for his paper.

"Here's my ticket," said Hirsch. "If the number stays up will you kindly cash it for me."

Joe said he would and studied the board intently as Hirsch left. Joe had never mentioned what horse he had in the race. Finally the objection was disallowed and Namath cashed his friend's bet. They met at the car.

Hirsch has an expression. He says, "Do you want to tell me anything?" It is his way of saying, "What's new?"

He walked up to Namath and said, "Do you want to tell me anything?"

"Yeah," said Joe, "I had the second horse."

Another couple of months in Florida, some more good times at the track and in the night scenes of Miami, and Joe Willie was back in New York on Dr. Nicholas's office table.

"Everything's coming along fine," Nicholas told him. "You can increase the exercising, play golf, start running and stop worrying. You'll be fine."

Joe took the doctor's advice immediately. He spent the next night dancing at a discotheque on 58th Street. The twenty-one-year-old quarterback was double-dating with the nineteen-year-old son of the Jets owner, Hubbard Werblin. It was a good way for the boss to find out how Namath was really progressing.

"No problems at all, Dad," Hubbard reported to his father. "Joe's fine. He's a real swinger. You should have seen him on the dance floor. He can do it all, the monkey, swim, mouse, everything. He's the wildest."

Werblin's happiness about Namath's physical condition was matched only by Werblin's happiness about Werblin's financial condition. The owner of the Jets had gambled everything on Namath and he already seemed to be winning. His star was drawing them in even before he had thrown a football in anger. Werblin was scoring with Namath.

"We are 23,000 tickets ahead of last year at this time," he said in April, "and a million dollars ahead in business."

Werblin and his partners had acquired the old Titans in 1964 and opened up for the first time in Shea that season. The 1965 season would be a new opening. This time Werblin had his star: Joe Willie Namath.

Werblin had definitely pulled a coup with the \$400,000 bonus beauty and everywhere Namath went the press was sure to follow. Stories came out of Alabama as Namath golfed and worked out lightly. Stories came out of Florida as Namath made the scene at the track. Stories came out of New York every time Namath was checked by Dr. Nicholas.

Namath even made news in his undershorts. Arthur Daley, no less, the distinguished Pulitzer Prize winning columnist of *The New York Times*, was captured in the Namath news-making machine. Daley reported that on the morning before the Kentucky Derby in Louisville a hotel waiter wheeled a breakfast table into Namath's room.

The waiter stared at the man in the blazing red shorts who was leaning over to tie his shoelaces. (Like most sports heroes, Namath puts his pants on one leg at a time. Unlike most, he puts his shoes on first.) The waiter was sure he knew the face. He just couldn't quite place the husky 6-2 body.

"You ain't a jockey, are you?" said the waiter.

"Sometimes I wish I was. I'm Joe Namath. I'm a football player."

"I thought I seen your picture in the papers," he said.

Indeed, he probably had. No man had his picture in the sports pages of America's daily newspapers more often that year than Joe Namath. Outside of the sports pages, he was probably running second only to Lyndon Johnson.

In June Namath made his first appearance on the field at Shea Stadium. The celebrated knee got the most attention. He put on a green T-shirt with a white football marked Jets across the chest, blue shorts, a gray sweat shirt and low-cut rubber-cleated football shoes. He slipped

on an elastic knee bandage with two steel-hinged braces on either side and sat down at a long table. He began to pull a weight up and down with his right leg. He pulled and tugged and groaned under the watchful eye of Weeb Ewbank, the crew-cut, middle-aged, Santa Claus-like coach the writers had nicknamed the Jolly Green Midget.

Ewbank was not a skillful man with words but he had a brilliant football mind, had been an enormous success as coach of the championship Baltimore Colt teams in 1958 and 1959 and now anxiously waited to teach his football methods to Namath.

"C'mon, Joe," Ewbank said when Namath finished exercising, "let's get some light work."

Namath walked out of the locker room. He carried a football in his right hand. His fingers spread across the laces. He held the ball tightly and flipped his wrist with it. He was getting the feel, the touch, the sensation. It was the first time he had held a football in front of his new coach.

Now he was on the field. A couple of local players and a friend of Namath's, Larry Patterson of Beaver Falls, had come over for the workout. The stands were empty and deathly still. The morning sun was high. The glare came in over Flushing bay. Namath bent under the center. He took the snap quickly, danced back ten paces, threw over the middle to Patterson, who had floated downfield ten yards. He caught the ball easily over his right shoulder, a picture catch, a perfect throw, all rhythm, and grace and timing.

A half-dozen newsmen, invited to watch Namath throw a football in an empty park, stood fifteen feet away as Namath repeated the pattern again. Weeb studied him. The writers watched. Was he really worth \$400,000?

Six newspapermen had come out to Shea Stadium on a muggy June day to watch a kid out of college throw a football to a pal in an empty field. Photographers were there to record the moment. There was a magnetism about Namath on a football field that could be felt almost from that very instant.

Namath held the ball high, flipped his wrist and the ball sailed downfield to Patterson, this time some forty

yards, true again, right in his hands. All of a sudden there seemed to be a picture of a filled ball park, 60,000 people screaming, a man in a green uniform racing down-field, Namath dancing, moving, pumping, throwing, the ball spinning on its course, into a receiver's hands, the referee charging to the play, holding his hands spread high above his head, the noise of the Stadium echoing across the Bay.

"That's fine, Joe, let's go in now."

Ewbank had seen enough. This was no ordinary arm. This arm would make them forget Unitas, forget Otto Graham, forget Sammy Baugh, forget them all. This arm would deserve to be bronzed some day.

Just before the Jets were to open their training camp at Peekskill Military Academy, Sonny Werblin called Larry Grantham into his office. Grantham was the defensive captain of the Jets, one of the few players who had been around when Harry Wismer owned the old Titans. Werblin wanted to clear the air.

"Larry," Werblin told the linebacker, "I want to know if you think there will be any problem because of Namath. I want it honestly."

Namath had been signed for \$400,000. Grantham had played four pro years and still hadn't made a tenth of that. There were rumors flying that the resentment over the money and the enormous amount of publicity Namath was getting was building into a troubled situation.

Werblin and Grantham talked for more than an hour. Grantham assured his boss there would be no problem. If Namath could help the Jets win he would be welcome. That was all that mattered. All the players cared about was what he did on the football field.

"There will be no morale problem," said Grantham.

Now it was time for the debut. Namath drove up to the small, quiet New York town in his Lincoln Continental. He pulled into the parking lot, marched through an office door, winked at a pretty secretary, kidded with a few visiting newsmen and was assigned a small room in the dormitory and uniform number 12. Joe Namath was a professional football player.

He was no ordinary rookie. His picture was on the

cover of *Sports Illustrated* magazine. A famed writer named W. C. Heinz was assigned a room down the hall from Namath to observe him for an article in *Life*. Television cameras and radio tape recorders were everywhere.

The next morning Namath ran on the field with the entire Jets squad. All eyes were on him. Now the calisthenics began. He rolled over, he bounced on the ground, he did situps and pushups, he did deep knee bends, he sweated in the summer sun.

"Quarterbacks over here and receivers over there," shouted Backfield Coach Clive Rush. "Let's go."

Namath bent down, picked up a football and started fingering it. The people in the stands who had come to see Namath came awake. He began throwing passes easily as his receivers ran downfield. He missed his first pass. Then his second. He hit his third. Then he missed again.

"Take it easy, Joe," said Ewbank, "take it easy."

Namath cocked his head and smiled at the grandfather figure who was nursing him along slowly. "Soon as I get warmed up, Coach, I'll hit every one of those goddamn receivers."

Then he started doing just that. Smack. Right into the hands of Bake Turner. Whack. Don Maynard catches one. Then Matt Snell and Billy Mathis and Turner again. Namath was coming on.

A whistle blew and the practice session was over. Namath had completed his first day as the most celebrated rookie quarterback in history. Now he sat in his small room, his green eyes studying a play book. He knew he was on the spot. He had to prove himself quickly. He knew the price of all the publicity: constant, never-ending pressure to be the best.

"I worry," he said, softly. "All the time, every day, worry, worry, worry."

A week after the camp opened Namath was settling into the groove. Ewbank told the press that the team's number one quarterback was veteran Mike Taliaferro. Namath or rookie John Huarte, the \$200,000 bonus player from Notre Dame and the Heisman Trophy winner, could take it from him.

"We'll go with the hot man," said Ewbank

No one was more warm than Namath. Especially around girls.

"Why not," Namath told Milton Gross of the *New York Post*, "I'm twenty-two, single, unengaged, uninvolved and interested."

Namath quickly admitted he liked girls. He liked pretty girls. He liked pretty blonde girls best of all.

"I'm not saying I dislike the rest of the girls. I love them all. A filly with brown hair is all right. So is one with black hair. But blondes, they come first."

Namath proved the point later that evening. While a newsman waited for Joe to fill an appointment for an interview, Namath was in town having a few drinks with a gorgeous blonde who just happened by the training camp. Namath didn't apologize.

"I like to have a good time," he said. "I like to relax. I can relax better with her than with you."

The newsman took it like a sport. Joe Namath was beginning to build his image. He would soon become the man all the other men wished they could be.

Image was one thing. Football was another. Namath went on the football field for the first time as a Jet quarterback in a rookie game against the Boston Patriots. Now he had to put up or shut up. Maybe not shut up because it was only an exhibition game but it could scare off some of the publicity. Nobody around the Jets wanted that.

Namath answered the challenge like a thoroughbred. He passed for two touchdowns, led the Jets to a 23-6 victory over Boston, showed poise and had no trouble with his heavily bandaged knee. They could talk about girls and night life and the swinging bachelor and knee operation all they wanted, but football was really Namath's thing.

He not only won the game, he endeared himself quickly to his teammates. His first call was an option pass to flanker Bob Schweikert. Schweikert had been a quarterback in college and this was Namath's way of showing him he knew that fact and respected it. Later in the game, he was replaced by Jim Turner at quarterback.

Namath went to the sidelines, cheered for Turner and gave him plenty of encouragement.

Ewbank was pleased by the whole show.

"Joe did very well for a rookie in his first game." Then he smiled from the tip of his round head to the toes of his stubby body. Weeb Ewbank knew something the rest of the world didn't. He knew that Joe Namath was super-special.

The Jets were to open the 1965 season against Houston. Ewbank announced that Taliaferro, the veteran, and not Namath would be the starting quarterback. Namath was upset but not shook.

"I got a hell of a lot to learn," he said. "Mike is doing better than me so he starts. That's only right."

The quarterback battle was a strange one around the Jets. Taliaferro was a journeyman quarterback. He had a fairly strong arm, was an average play caller and had no special magnetism as a leader. Huarte, the Notre Dame kid, was typical of Notre Dame football players. He looked better on magazine covers and in college football programs than he did on the field. He was not very tall, threw sidearm and was inaccurate. He hardly seemed like a professional football quarterback. Now there was Namath. He was tall. He had a marvelous arm. He could throw long or short. He was an imaginative play caller. All he lacked was experience.

"He'll play when I think he has better command of the overall game," said Ewbank.

While the fans and the press steamed, Ewbank was doing the only prudent thing. Professional football was too tough a battlefield to throw an untried kid into without preparation. Not even Joe Namath could march on the field and move a pro team.

In fact, Joe Namath couldn't march at all. The country was about to find that out.

On Wednesday morning at 7 a.m., just a week after the Jets had lost their opening game of the season to Houston, 27-21, with Namath never moving off the phones and onto the field, Namath was reporting to 39 Whitehall Street in Manhattan for an Army physical examination.

The twenty-two-year-old had a good chance of deferment. He was healthy enough to play football, all right, but the Army needs people who can march. Joe Namath couldn't march. The January knee operation had healed well enough for Namath to play, but the Army usually shied away from men with knee problems. Men like that can't march. What's worse, they cost the government a fortune in disability money after they are separated from the service.

"I'll do whatever the Army tells me to do," said Namath. "If they take me, they take me. At least it's better than getting married."

Whitehall street is a nasty, old block in the Battery area of Manhattan just a few blocks from the East River. It is dark and dirty and ugly. The morning ritual in front of number 39 for more than thirty years included a hundred young men reporting for military physicals or induction. Hundreds of thousands of men have gone through the building, some never again to return home.

Even at that early hour Namath was greeted by shouting, screaming teenagers, a handful of newsmen, photographers and TV people and a smiling, fat sergeant at the door. He opened the thick double doors, posed for a picture with Namath and took him inside.

The Army would not announce its findings for several weeks. Namath went back to playing football. The Jets were about to play their home opener at Shea against the Kansas City Chiefs. Namath was on the bench again.

Namath simply wasn't ready. He didn't have his confidence and he was still learning.

"I have to use my best quarterback," Weeb said. "This week Mike is our best."

Ewbank was going on what he had seen. He wasn't going on scouting reports of the two men. Scouting reports could be wrong.

"I remember one I read when I was with Baltimore," said Ewbank. "It said about Jimmy Brown: Don't take him. He's a fumbler."

Taliaferro led the Jets for the first four games of the season. Namath got some work and began to get some feel for the game. By the fifth game of the season the

Jets had not yet won. They had four straight losses and a tie.

The fans were becoming restless. They wanted Namath. That's what they had paid to see. Ewbank was becoming just as restless. He wanted to win.

Namath started against the Oakland Raiders, one of the more brutal teams in professional football. Namath had a fine day and the Jets tied the Raiders, 24-24. Namath started again the following week against the powerful San Diego Chargers. The Jets broke down on defense and the Chargers crushed them, 34-9.

In his seventh game as a professional quarterback and his third start, Namath got a win. He was, that afternoon against the Denver Broncos, the quarterback Sonny Werblin had dreamed of when he wrote out his huge check. Namath was cool, marvelously poised, led the team with skill, and had his first victory as a pro, 45-10.

Two weeks later the good news came that Namath's knee was not up to Army standards. He was classified 4F. He celebrated by leading the Jets to a victory over Boston, 30-20.

Now he was in the groove. He was winning. He was making the right call. He was passing long and accurately to Don Maynard, Bake Turner and George Sauer. He was using his running backs with skill. He was exciting Jets fans and turning on television stations to NBC on Sundays for American Football League games.

Namath was happy. Ewbank was happy. Werblin was happy. Things were looking good. Namath had decided that he was doing well enough in football to spend some more time relaxing. He moved into a fashionable apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Coach Ewbank didn't like it.

"Joe, I think you'd be better off living in Flushing near the ball park. That's where most of the players live," said Ewbank.

"I gotta have some fun," said Namath. "Manhattan is where I can relax better."

His relaxing was filling space in most of the town's gossip columns. Night or day, on the field or off, Joe Namath was big news.

On October 8 the Army decided Namath was such big news that they had better look at his knee again. Complaints about Namath were pouring into Army headquarters. How could he play football and be 4F while boys were dying in Vietnam?

The Army examined him again and this time called in an orthopedic specialist named Dr. Frank E. Stinchfield to do the job at New York's Harkness Pavilion, one of the city's most famous hospitals. Most examinations of this kind usually took place at St. Alban's Naval Hospital on Long Island. Namath was getting the extra special look. Again the Army decided it didn't want his knees for their very own.

"It may seem illogical he should be found unfit for Army service," said a spokesman, "but fit for professional football. It must be remembered that Namath has doctors and trainers available to him at every instant. In Vietnam the life and safety of his comrades might depend on his performance under extremely adverse conditions."

After two very careful examinations, Namath was free to go on pursuing his chosen work without interruption.

Early in December the Jets flew to California for games against San Diego and Oakland.

Namath worked out by day and swung by night. His favorite date was with blonde, busty Mamie Van Doren, who had just broken up with baseball player Bo Belinsky. They spent the night frugging, doing the watusi and enjoying other Hollywood dances.

"Joe's cute," reported Mamie, some ten years his senior.

"I'm in love with Mamie," announced Joe. "She's a girl, ain't she?"

Namath didn't have as much fun the following week in Oakland. He had Ben Davidson, a mustachioed brute, hugging him instead of Mamie Van Doren, and the Jets were beaten 24-14. Namath had a few choice words for Davidson, the 270-pound defensive lineman who viciously cracked Joe's head with his forearm.

"He has no class," Namath said. "He hit me after I got rid of the ball. Football is a tough game. You have to expect a pounding. If I didn't want to participate in

a contact sport, I'd go in for swimming. But that was just dirty."

"What's he complaining about," said Davidson. "He gets paid enough."

The ugly green monster called jealousy was showing its head again. Namath was a target for all the head-hunters in the league. He was a rich quarterback. What other incentive did they need?

The season ended against Buffalo as Namath led the Jets to another win, 14-12. The team had finished with a disappointing 5-8-1 record but Namath's rookie year was impressive.

He had thrown 18 touchdown passes, completed 164 passes in 340 tries, thrown for 2,220 yards, and won the American Football League's Rookie of the Year Award. Joe Namath was here to stay. So was his knee.

One winter night in Greenwich Village, satirists Robert Benton and David Newman wrote a patter for a comedian. "Oh, Sybil, darling, I'd love to come to your party but I can't. I'm going to the taping of Joe Namath's knee."

6

1966: THE YEAR OF THE LLAMA

It takes a lot to turn New York on.

Joe Namath turned New York on with a rug. He did more for the rug business than Ali Baba. Namath's rug couldn't fly. Anybody who saw it did. It was crazy. It was ridiculous. It was beautiful. It was out of this world and in Namath's penthouse apartment on East 76th Street in Manhattan.

There is very little to say about llamas. They come from Peru, spend their days prancing through a wilderness and wind up as forgotten animals. Some llamas made it big. They wound up on the floor of Namath's apartment.

Namath hired a decorator to furnish his apartment. He told the decorator to try and keep the cost down, say, to about \$25,000. After all, Joe spends less than six months a year in his New York pad. There are hotels with

the Jets on the road. There is Alabama in the spring time. There is Miami in the winter. Who needs to spend more than \$25,000 on a temporary pad?

The decorator's *pièce de résistance* for Namath was the llama rug. White llama rug. Deep llama rug. Soft llama rug. For \$1,000 a square foot, the llama rug begins in the dining room, under the glass-topped dining table and crystal chandelier and black and white brocade chairs. Then on into the living room. Up to the ottoman, a brown suede ottoman, where Namath spends his evening scratching football plays into his sofa.

Like a cost-conscious housewife Namath had a serious problem with his llama rug.

"I don't know how the hell to keep the thing clean," he said. "Maybe the best thing to do is get a lawn mower and cut it off."

The thought is upsetting. How could Namath harm this rug? Especially after spending so much of his time picking the dust particles of Little Old New York out of his llama.

"I know what," Namath said one dreamy day. "If we win the championship I'll go out and get a new one. I'll get a new one every year. As soon as it gets dirty I'll throw it out and get a new one."

Namath's apartment got almost as much attention as Namath. Girls knocked on his door for every imaginable pretext to see it. Sports writers who hadn't interviewed an athlete at his own home in thirty years beat a path to Namath's door. Teammates waited for the inevitable call from Joe: "C'mon over, we're grilling some steaks. We'll play some cards; have a few drinks." An invitation to Namath's pad was a higher notch on the social ladder than an engraved invitation from Truman Capote.

Namath managed not to spend all his time walking through his white llama rug with his white soft-soled shoes. A lot of the times, he walked through swinging New York nightspots with his white soft-soled shoes. Weeb Ewbank wouldn't understand. Joe just couldn't make it in Flushing.

One night he was sitting in one of his favorite haunts, Dudes 'N' Dolls, on Third Avenue. He was with a few

friends. He was entertaining them with stories about football players and girlfriends. Suddenly the conversation lagged. Everybody looked at Joe for his next scene. He didn't fail his friends.

"Look at this, baby. You ever seen this done before?"

He placed the lighted end of a cigarette against the index finger of his \$400,000 throwing arm. Then he flipped the cigarette in his mouth. He did it three times without a miss.

"Aw, come on," he said, "let's fly this joint."

Namath rushed out into the street after his cigarette act and whistled for a cab. Joe and his friends piled in. Typical of New York cabbies, the driver grumbled about the weather, the crowded New York streets, the short distance Namath wanted to go, the fact that it was Wednesday, the time of night, the size of his fat wife. He was a classic case.

Namath studied the driver's license. "Don't get all bothered, Francisco," he said sweetly. "Take it easy, baby. We just live day by day."

"Yeah," said Francisco, "I've been driving twelve hours. I wanna go home."

"I work hard myself. Live a little. Don't worry so much."

"Yeah. What kind of work you in?"

"Manual labor," said Joe Willie Namath.

On July 14 Joe Namath went to work. He arrived at the Jets training camp for the start of his second season. He had become the single most famous athlete in America in one year. There was not a reader of the sports pages in America who did not know the name of Joe Namath.

So far it only meant a \$400,000 bonus. Namath wanted it to start meaning a winning football team. He told reporters as much when they gathered around him the first day of camp. He pulled a red shirt over his sweat shirt, laced up his white shoes and reviewed his rookie season.

"Sure it was satisfying," he said. "When you come out of college and can play pro football right away it has to be satisfying. Football's my life, man. Football's what

I do for a living I want to be the best at it. Unless you win, it doesn't matter. Unless you win, you ain't done nothing. I haven't won I ain't done a thing."

Namath wasn't talking about llama rugs or apartments or blonde beauties or fun in Florida. He was talking about football. He was talking about leading the Jets to a championship.

The two leagues had just agreed to a merger. The National Football League had accepted the American Football League and now they would be a combined pro football business. The signing of Namath by Werblin for \$400,000 was probably the single most important push toward merger. Namath felt a little sorry for the players yet to come.

"Without the merger, there was some bidding. Now a large contract will be pretty hard to come by."

Then Namath's green eyes grew large and he looked off toward some private dream.

"I'll tell you one thing," he drawled in his adopted Alabama best, "I'm really looking forward to that title game between the two leagues."

Namath was quick to see what the star of the first American Football League team to beat the National Football League champion might command in endorsements, attention and status. The fun wouldn't be bad either.

"Well, let me go to work, you guys," said Namath. "We're after that championship now for sure."

The sun was warm and pleasant as Namath stepped out on the field for his first day of football work in 1965. His knee felt fine. His arm was loose from a month of easy throwing at Alabama. He was anxious to get going. One of the first tests would be an exhibition game against the Houston Oilers in Birmingham, Alabama. Sonny Werblin had scheduled the game so Namath's old friends at Alabama could see him play as a professional.

On August 13 the Jets took the field against the Houston Oilers in a pre-season exhibition game before 57,205 people at Legion Field in Birmingham. Joe Namath, who had led Alabama to three Bowl games in three seasons, was returning to the scene of his greatest

triumphs. The crowd roared its welcome to Namath as he danced through the goal posts, his white shoes glowing in the lights, a small smile on his face, his knees a little nervous from the extra attention of his old friends.

"Man, I wanna do good for these people. I just love them," he said.

Early in the first quarter Namath handed off to fullback Matt Snell. Snell drove into the Houston line and was gang-tackled by four or five Oilers who had guessed he would be coming to them at that spot.

"I heard a whistle," explained Snell, "and I slammed the ball down. I thought the play was over. I was mad because I had only made two yards on the play."

Namath was standing off to Snell's left after handing him the ball. He was facing forward and slightly to the right. When the football bounced he saw Ernie Ladd, the 290-pound behemoth, encircle the ball like a bear. Ladd started to run and the earth moved. Namath was near the referee and looked at him and said, "Hey, you can't give him the ball. . . ."

Suddenly a huge body smashed into Namath. He fell hard to the ground. The body, later identified in game films as defensive end Don Floyd, fell on Namath and twisted over his right knee.

Namath lay on the ground quite still. The pain shot up his right side and into his upper body. It stung and ached and throbbed. Several of the Jets and trainer Jeff Snedecker were around him. Snedecker examined the knee. He held it gently in his hand and flexed it. He moved it up and down. The knee still had some mobility. At least it wasn't locked.

Namath was helped to his feet and limped off the field. A strange silence fell over the crowd. There were some boos. Mostly, stunned quiet. They had waited more than a year to see Namath as a pro quarterback and now in a few minutes it was over. They might never see him again. The Jets were worried at that instant that they might not see Namath again either.

Namath flew back to New York with the team and immediately went to the office of Dr. Nicholas for x-rays.

Dr. Nicholas was the calmest man around after the examination.

"The injury is just a minor strain behind the right knee," said Dr. Nicholas. "It is a wrenched knee but it has no relationship to the knee problems of last year. There is no damage to the bony structures in the knee."

Dr. Nicholas tapped the knee and removed fluid but found little blood in the fluid.

"That's a good sign that there isn't any serious damage," he said.

For the second time in two seasons, Namath's knees would be studied more closely than Betty Grable's.

Namath was told to stay off his feet for a couple of days. He could begin light workouts in a week and would be ready to play again in three weeks.

Namath settled down to wait it out in the small, uncomfortable room in Peekskill. He would have rather spent the time in his New York pad, but rules were rules.

While he was in Peekskill, Joe Hirsch, his friend from the *Morning Telegraph*, was spending some time in Namath's apartment.

"What does Joe do for knee exercises when he is home?" Hirsch was asked.

"Bends down," he said, "to pick up the clothes he throws on the floor. That keeps him in better shape than playing."

Namath was a casual liver. He would wear a T-shirt and shorts around the apartment no matter who was visiting. Hirsch looked like he slept in a tuxedo. He never had a hair or a shirt out of place.

"Joe just likes to relax in his own home," said Hirsch.

Hirsch appreciated the fact that Namath was riding high. No one ever knows how long a ride like that can last. With his knees it could be all over in a day. Namath was not taking any chances.

"I like to live a little," he said one day, "I don't expect to make it to fifty."

It was the same kind of depressed melancholia once expressed by Mickey Mantle.

Namath's desires for high living if he had to combat a fast life led to a popular joke people told about him.

There was a visitor to an old age home. The first old man said he owed his long life to the fact that he didn't smoke. When asked how old he was, he said he was ninety-two. The second old man said he didn't drink. He said he was eighty-nine. The third old man said he didn't go out with women. He said he was eighty-seven. The fourth old man said he drank, smoked, stayed up late and went out with women.

"And how old are you?"

"Twenty-six," said Joe Namath; so goes the joke.

The football season for the Jets opened against Miami. Namath was able to play, though Weeb Ewbank kept the press guessing until the very last moment. The Jets played a conservative game, beat the Miami Dolphins, 19-14, and started getting ready for the revenge match the following week against Houston at Shea Stadium.

Namath, Larry Grantham and several other members of the Jets had been injured in the exhibition game against Houston in Birmingham. Football players, like elephants, never forget. The Jets had some debts to pay back.

Namath's knee was heavily braced and he was ready for anything. This time he would keep his eyes open all the time and look at every direction at once.

About 10 o'clock in the morning Sonny Werblin arrived at the ball park. He knew it was going to be a very special day. The traffic was already building for the 1 o'clock game. Many people had driven their cars to Shea, pulled into the parking lot, pulled down the backs of their station wagons, pulled out some beer and sandwiches and enjoyed a picnic. They became known as the New York Jets Marching and Chowder Society. The only marching they did was to get another beer opener.

By noon the lot was almost filled and still they came, by car, by bus, by subway, by truck, even by boat into Flushing Bay. Joe Namath had drawn 54,681 people into Shea Stadium to see if his knee was really well again. It was the highest attendance in the history of the American Football League. Sonny Werblin sat in his box in the press level with his wife, and thought of what he had wrought. They snickered and laughed at him when he formed a syndicate and bought the Titans from Harry

Wisner. Now he was sitting in Shea Stadium with 54,681 paid customers. He had a great show. He was about to show the world he had a great star.

The game began with both sides ready for blood. These were the two teams who would fight it out for the divisional title and maybe they could settle it as early as the second game of the season. The hitting on the line was ferocious. Sam DeLuca, the quick, strong Jet guard, was controlling huge Ernie Ladd and keeping him from Namath.

The score was 7-6 for the Jets with less than two minutes to go in the first half. Namath had stayed coolly with the game plan. He was probing, exploring, reaching out for holes in the Houston defense. He never panicked. He never lost control of himself or the game. He acted with the skill, poise and calmness of a Sammy Baugh or a Johnny Unitas or a Norm Van Brocklin. Joe Namath was growing up as a quarterback.

Then Namath passed to Matt Snell on the left side while the Oilers were sucked into a fake to the right. Snell went for a touchdown. Al Atkinson intercepted a Houston pass. Namath had the ball again with 70 seconds left in the half. Namath passed to end Pete Lammons and the Jets had busted open the ball game, 21-6.

When the afternoon was over, Namath had thrown five touchdown passes, gained 283 yards with his golden arm, led the Jets to their second straight win and made the team a serious contender for the title.

It was not one of the more quiet nights on the llama rug.

The Jets beat Denver, tied Boston and beat San Diego in the next three games. Things were going well for Namath and the Jets except in one serious area.

"My damn knee is killing me," Namath confessed to a friend.

The weekly pounding, despite Herculean efforts by the Jets defense, was taking its toll on Namath. He would not complain and he brushed off most questions about his knees. Still, reporters who covered the club could watch Namath dress for a workout. That told more than any words. He wore an 18-ounce knee brace each day

and wrapped it all with yards of elastic bandage. His right leg was almost twice the size of his left under his football pants.

"I couldn't play without it," said Namath, "but once the game starts I forget about it."

The sixth game of the season was coming up. The Jets were to play the Houston Oilers at their home field at Rice Stadium in Texas. Houston was ready. Maybe the Jets weren't.

A few days before the game, Namath had been at a party at the bachelor apartment of his teammate, Bill Mathis. A lot of the Jets had attended with their girlfriends. There was a good deal of drinking and Namath arrived at Shea Stadium the following day for a workout on shaky knees. This time the injuries didn't seem to be the cause. Sonny Werblin had actually showed up at the party himself. He apparently had come to ask Namath to go a little more slowly in his night routine. It was fine to have parties, Werblin suggested, but the time, the place and the company should be controlled.

Namath seemed to be living the same life in season and out. He was young, he was handsome, he was rich, he liked girls, he drank, he was anxious to enjoy himself. He didn't believe a party on Wednesday had any bearing on his performance on Sunday.

Namath hadn't been a monk for the first five games of the season and the Jets were undefeated. There didn't seem to be any cause for complaints.

On Saturday night before the Houston game in Texas, Namath spent the early evening with some friends at the hotel bar. He was laughing and drinking and buying. There was, as always, a gorgeous blonde at Namath's elbow. The game was still almost a half-day away.

Namath took the field to loud cheers at Houston as the TV cameras closed in to his handsome face. He seemed no different than he had seemed several Sundays this season. He probably didn't realize what was about to happen.

Houston wanted this game more than any game the team had ever played before. One thing that drives a professional team is being embarrassed. Houston was

embarrassed in New York before a huge crowd and a national television audience. They were not about to be embarrassed again before their home fans.

They charged Namath viciously the first time the Jets had the ball. They mauled him and beat him and harassed him. They hit him as hard as they could and stayed on top of him as long as they could. Namath never had enough time to get set. He could never pick out his receivers. Every play he called was wrong. Every pass he threw was too short, too long or into a Houston player's hands.

When the game was over, the Jets had been badly defeated, 24-0. It was the first time in Namath's pro career that his team had ever been held scoreless. Namath had been intercepted four times. Now he was the one who was embarrassed.

The doors of the Jets clubhouse opened quickly and reporters rushed to Ewbank for an explanation of the poor game.

"A bad day," he said. "Everybody has one of those once in a while. I'm not worried. We're still in first place."

The reporters were not buying a bland explanation like that. They wanted more meat for their Monday stories. They converged on Namath. He would tell it like it was. He always had. Good or bad, he was honest about his own performance, sometimes even super-critical. He was striving for perfection as a quarterback. He was disappointed when he didn't achieve it.

He unlaced his cleats and was working on his bandaged knee. He bent over slowly and uncoiled the bandage. His black hair was tousled and dirty. He had a welt under his right eye. His arms were cut and scraped. His uniform number 12 was covered with the ugly brown dirt of the ball park.

"Bad day," said a reporter.

"Yeah," said Namath, "bad day."

"The interceptions were tough."

"Yeah, the interceptions were tough."

"They were really up for the game"

"Yeah, they were up for it."

The reporters couldn't crack through Namath. He

obviously didn't want to talk about the game. Their questions were bland. They were afraid of an outburst. His answers were bland. He was afraid of the same thing.

Jimmy Cannon, the famed syndicated columnist who had covered two wars and counted names like DiMaggio, Joe Louis, Hemingway and Toots Shor among his closest friends, moved in for the kill. In the twilight of his career, Cannon is still, above all, a tough reporter. He has created a sportswriting style that thousands who came after him followed. He lived the creed that journalism was literature in a hurry. He treated his writing with dignity. He expected his person to be treated the same way.

Cannon bore in hard. He wanted to know about the interceptions. He wanted to know why Namath could have such a good day one week and such a bad day the next. There had to be an explanation. It wasn't just the Houston defense. It was Namath. Why, why, why?

"I was up all night," said Namath. "Booze and broads, that's why I played so lousy. That's what it was. That's what you wanted to hear, wasn't it?"

Then Namath threw his uniform shirt into his locker and stormed off into the shower room. The reporters felt cheated. They hadn't heard about the red-dogging or the automatics or the flair passes or the screens or the zones that they wanted Namath to talk about for their Monday editions. Namath had talked only about booze and broads. Who the hell could write anything about that?

Cannon could. And he did. He merely quoted Namath accurately in his column the next morning and the *New York Journal-American* played it over the routine violence of the day. The headlines were black and huge, something the *Journal-American* was famous for, something the paper could always be counted on for, something the public grew a little too sophisticated to take, as the demise of the paper a year later was to prove.

But this was a readable story. Namath says, "Booze and broads did it." It may have been the very first time in American sports history that an athlete has been publicly quoted on the subject while he was still playing.

Namath said it and Cannon wrote it. Maybe both of them did a service to sports and journalism. Now it was

out in the open. Most ballplayers, football, baseball, basketball, any other sport, drink. Some drink more. Some drink less. Almost all drink. The non-drinkers advertise it. The drinkers don't.

Athletes also chase broads. Or broads chase them. The saying goes, "The road will make a bum out of the best of them."

At least Namath was honest about it. At least he wasn't calling up any wife on the phone, whispering sweet nothings at home and then spending the night with a good and great friend. He was a young, single, healthy young man with normal desires. He simply refused to play the sham that most athletes, married and single, played. He loved football. He wanted to play it on his terms. If he wanted to drink, he would drink. If he wanted to smoke, he would smoke. If he wanted to chase women, he would chase women. It was the only way he knew how to live.

Casey Stengel, the famed baseball philosopher, once said, "Going to bed with a woman never hurt a ballplayer. It's staying up all night looking for them that does you in."

Cannon's column caused a furor. The Jets office was hit with phone calls and nasty letters. (Nobody, of course, was brash enough to cancel his tickets to the hottest sports attraction in town.) Namath got some bad mail. He also got some good mail. A lot of kids, not much younger than Joe, thought he was an eloquent spokesman for them. It was almost as all the teenyboppers were saying, "Praise Joe Namath and pass the pills."

Sonny Werblin, as always, came to Namath's defense. He pointed out that Joe, after all, was a young man of twenty-three and sometimes words came out of a young man's mouth before he knows what he is saying.

"It was facetious," said Werblin. "It was off the top of his head. It was nothing more than a petulant remark. He is a kid after all."

Werblin never denied Namath had made the statement. He never denied that Namath, after all, had probably had a date before the game and had taken a drink.

He just seemed to feel that Namath might not have been wise in saying it and Cannon wasn't charitable in printing it.

As with everything Namath said and did in the first two years in New York, it only got the Madison Avenue crowd and the East Side pub crawlers more involved in Joe's scene. "Booze and broads" became the password of First Avenue.

There was no denying Namath had become a big celebrity in the town that isn't supposed to be moved by celebs.

Namath was spending big, talking big and living big. Werblin understood him. "Every artist I ever handled did things that seemed glamorous to them. One day you have nothing. The next day you are making \$300,000 to \$400,000 a year. What happens to you? I'm not thinking of a twenty-three-year-old. I'm thinking of men in their forties and fifties. How would they handle it? Could they handle it?"

Not many people ever were presented with a \$400,000 temptation, a golden arm, good looks and single bliss in one quick burst. Namath handled it the way most young men would. He enjoyed it.

Weeb Ewbank had none of Namath's calling cards. Nobody ever gave him \$400,000. He had the face of a tired bulldog and was a grandfather, so he probably couldn't identify with Namath's after-hours scene.

"We've talked about Joe's conduct," Ewbank said. "We have an understanding about it."

The understanding was that Ewbank would do nothing to hamper Joe off the field. The off-the-field act was in Sonny Werblin's hands. Ewbank was boss on the field. He did a marvelous job at that. He waited to play Namath until he was ready. Now he was ready. Then he gave him a game plan and made him stick to it. Weeb was skillful on the field. Joe was skillful on and off. The second part of Joe's act slightly bewildered Weeb. His first great quarterback, Johnny Unitas, was a crew-cut square. Weeb thought all quarterbacks should be that way. Joe Namath just wasn't all quarterbacks.

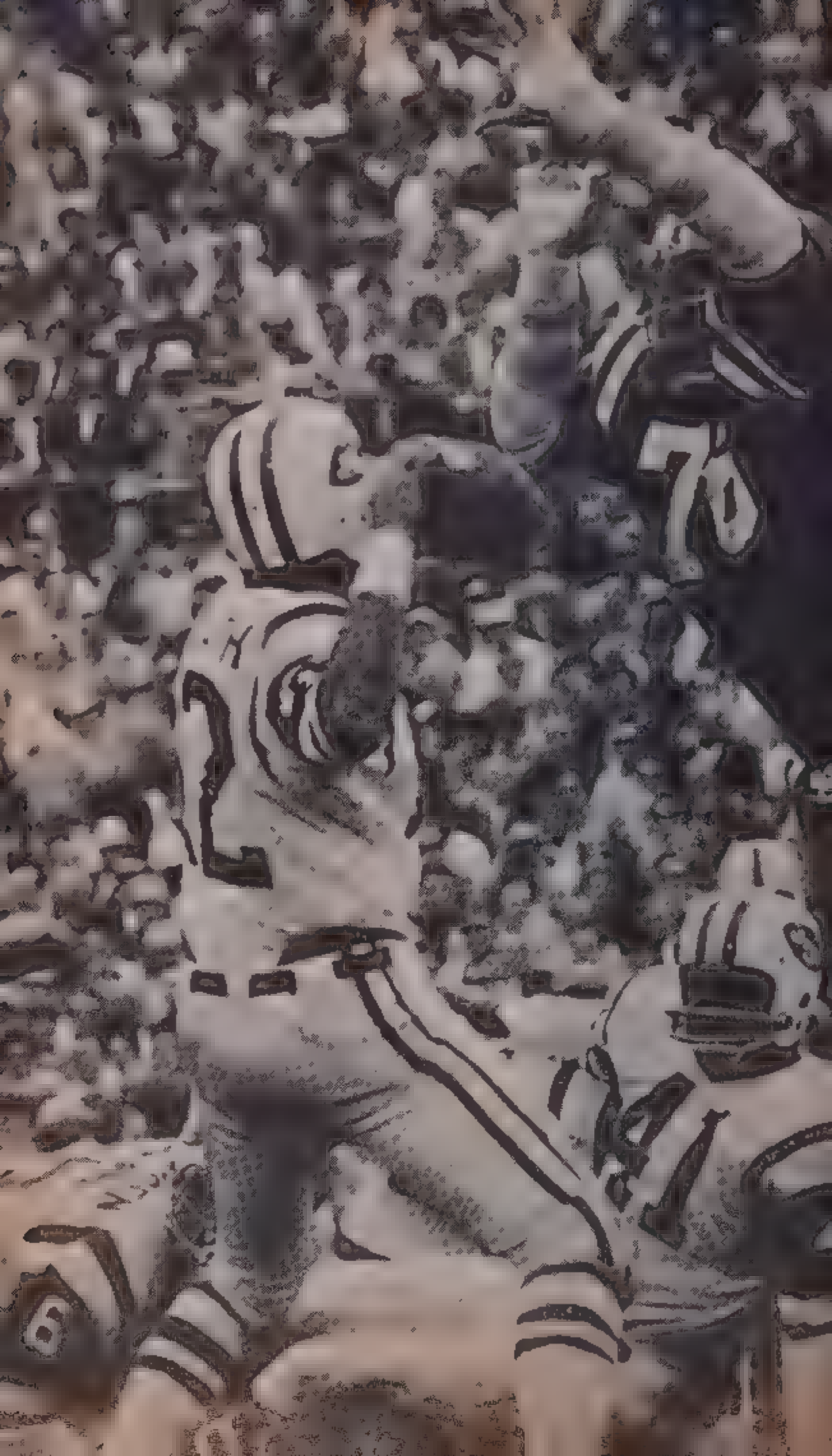
When reporters questioned Weeb about Joe's carous-

BROADWAY J.E.
NAMATH
IS
LEGAL

NEW YORK HAS
BROADWAY
BUT
S.F. HAS
BROADWAY
TOPLESS
GIRL



How popular is popular Joe Namath outside New York City?
Above, Joe being mobbed in San Francisco after Super Bowl.





Peak action at Super Bowl game. Bubba Smith, left, leaps to prevent Namath's pass. Above, two views of Joe's hand off to running back Emerson Boozer, 32. Joe masterminded game with great cool.



Above, a younger Joe Namath poses with Alabama coach Paul Bryant, after Joe sparked his team to win the Orange Bowl. Bryant credited the 17-0 victory in to star quarterback.





Joe smiles with Jet coach Weeb Ewbank, left, and Sonny Werblin, right, after signing with Jets for reported \$400,000. Below, Joe frowns at the report of the sum in newspapers.







Teary-eyed Joe after announcing his "retirement"

Joe likes blondes and is considered the number 1 member of the Jet set. Left, with beard in Miami. Right, at Ft. Lauderdale.







The famous knee
after his opera-
tion at Lenox Hill
Hospital, left.
Right, being
taped before
Super Bowl.



Coach Ewbank confers with three of his stars. Left to right, Don Maynard, Ewbank, George Sauer, and Namath.

The athletic upset of the century resulted in Joe receiving coveted Ray Hickok "Professional Athlete of the Year" belt.



ing, the coach replied, "Joe's been on very good behavior." Weeb probably meant as far as calling plays. He wasn't sure about his post-game activity.

"Joe's been on good behavior, but of course," said the coach, "I haven't been to any night clubs with him lately."

By the end of the week the drinking, girl-chasing, staying-up-late furor had started to die down. Namath did only one thing differently than a lot of football players. It wasn't drinking and going out with girls. It was talking about it.

"Maybe," said Ewbank, "Joe just might have to censor what he says to certain reporters."

Namath had a good game against Oakland the following Sunday but the Jets lost again, 24-21. Old enemy Ben Davidson, who was making a name for himself with his flame handlebar moustache and his Namath-hunting forearm, was in the quarterback's long hair all afternoon.

Things stayed about the same for the next four weeks. The Jets lost twice in a row to Buffalo, beat Miami and lost to Kansas City. The good start had now faded into another losing year.

As Namath prepared for the last three games against Oakland, San Diego and Boston, Ewbank was asked to evaluate his second year quarterback.

"He's getting better, getting better in a hurry," Weeb said. "The fans are impatient for instant success. It takes time to develop a professional quarterback. Right now he is much closer to being a polished pro quarterback than Bart Starr or Johnny Unitas were in their second seasons."

He was on the threshold of breaking all the New York passing records in his second season as a pro. It was quite an achievement for a twenty-three-year-old quarterback.

All of this had to be considered in light of his bad knee. Twenty months after his knee operation, Namath had not fully recovered his agility. In fact it seemed to be getting worse. There were whispers that a second knee operation was necessary. Each whisper was met with a firm and rapid denial by the Jets. This is the kind of

thing newsmen have long learned to be wary of. The more a team denies something about its leading athletes, the closer the reporter is coming to the real truth. Namath usually shrugged when asked about the knee. "It's the same as always," he would say.

Because of the knee problems, one aspect of Namath's game was taken from him. He couldn't fake a pass and then run. He could only fake a pass and then pass.

"I don't run rollouts and I don't scramble," said Namath, "so that takes the pressure off the defense. I'm not under orders not to run, but I know that the coaches don't like me to run. But I'm not frustrated. What am I going to do? This is my life and I'm going to live with it," he said.

The Jets tied Oakland, were beaten badly by San Diego and ended the season on a hopeful note by upsetting Boston. The Jets had finished with a 6-6-2 record, just slightly better than their 1965 record. Namath was much better. He had gained 3,379 yards, thrown 19 touchdown passes and had a .493 completion percentage.

And when the season ended the Jets admitted he did it all on one knee. Don Floyd's pre-season takeout of Namath had wrecked his knee for the year. Namath had played all season with a torn cartilage. Even Ewbank didn't know it.

"I suspected it the way he would set," said the coach. "When he dropped back to throw you could see that something was wrong. I asked him about it and he would say, 'Don't worry, Coach, it will be all right.' I sure admire his guts. He really stayed in there. Not many of them would."

The operation was scheduled for a couple of days before New Year's. A couple of days before Christmas, Namath went to Beaver Falls to visit his family. When a reporter reached him at his mother's home, he asked if the knee operation would help his career.

"My career, hell, this operation isn't for football. This operation is for my life. I have trouble getting in and out of cabs. I can't walk upstairs. I was standing around my apartment last week and I made a turn, just a simple

pivot and it buckled. I almost fell down. That's no way to live."

And Namath made no mention what the bad knee was doing to his frugging.

On December 28, 1966, a husky, handsome man, wearing a well trimmed goatee, marched through the doors of Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. Joe Namath was back for another knee operation. Some nurses swooned. Others weren't so charitable. All they could think of was the volume of mail and calls, the constant moving about of their other patients toward Namath's room, and reporters sneaking around back doors of the hospital.

"He is a lovely boy," said one gray-haired nurse, "but we do wish he'd take his knee elsewhere."

Dr. Nicholas was joined by two other orthopedic surgeons as he cut into Namath's knee again. They removed the torn lateral cartilage and loose bodies from the cartilage debris in the knee and transferred tendon to the knee cap. This operation was far more serious than the original knee surgery performed almost two years before.

One of the ironies, not lost on anybody, was that one of the doctors working with the Jets' team physician, Dr. James Nicholas, was Dr. Frank E. Stinchfield, who had been summoned by the Army to examine Namath after he failed his first military physical. Now Dr. Stinchfield was on the inside of Namath's knee looking out. Namath would not have any trouble flunking another military examination.

Sonny Werblin was watching over Namath again as he awoke after the operation. It wasn't just because he wanted to protect his investment. The Jets boss truly admired, respected and liked the young man who had made the Jets a success. Werblin was on Joe's put-on team.

"How do you feel?" Sonny asked.

"Okay," Joe said.

"You look better now that they shaved off your beard."

Namath reached for his chin, felt the goatee and laughed at his boss's joke. Werblin was one of the few

people around who understood Namath completely. Werblin had spent his life around stars. He knew how to talk to them.

Even Sonny Werblin, for all his magnificent accomplishments, had never had a star like Joe Willie Namath Nobody had.

7

1967: THE LONGEST NIGHT

The noise of the crowd, the vibrating hips of the pretty cheerleaders, the rich green grass, the color, the excitement, the adulation, the sensational Sundays for a professional football player, begin in the cool of September.

August is for anguish.

Professional football teams assemble in July for their season's work. The first few days they shake loose the cobwebs of summer. Then in the heat and dirt of an old high school field, a rented college dormitory or a private school, the \$100,000-a-year stars of the Green Bay Packers, the New York Giants, the Oakland Raiders, the New York Jets and all the others ready themselves for the fall fun. They need July because they have had January and February and March and April and May and June to forget that a down and out takes cross blocking; that a sweep left means a head fake; that hut-one, hut-two means a go on four. Their bodies have grown soft. Their toughness has disappeared under the loving care of wives and girlfriends, sometimes a little from both.

Now it is August. The cheers and the press clippings and the heroics of Sunday are still a month away. August is sweat. August is Army food. August is crowded quarters. August is the longest month for a professional football player.

The Jets trained in the Peekskill Military Academy, just a suburban car ride from New York City. It was a fine place to be if you were a fifteen-year-old private school student. It was hardly the same if you were a football player. It was a terrible drag if you were a foot-

ball player named Joe Willie Namath. Peekskill was noticeably shy of night life, pretty blondes, swinging bars, groovy friends. Peekskill was not Joe Namath's Paradise Lost

By the first week of August the camp had become boring. Namath was now in his third year as a professional. He had proved he could play. He needed regular season combat to get his competitive juices flowing. The training season was window dressing.

The Jets finished a workout in the humid heat of a Friday afternoon on August 3. They were scheduled to go by bus the next morning to Bridgeport, Connecticut (Everything outside of New York, the swingers say, is Bridgeport, but this was the real one—the one on the map), for an exhibition game against the Boston Patriots. Exhibition games are more fun than workouts but less fun than a regular season game. The rookies try hard for jobs in exhibition games. The veterans try hard not to get hurt.

Namath, still not throwing normally after the winter knee surgery, was erratic in the final exercise before the game. It was terribly hot. It was humid. His knee ached. There was nothing to motivate him for the game. Much of football, much of sports, indeed, much of life, is motivation. Namath had none.

On top of all this normal drudgery came the news that one of Namath's brothers was ill with a leg problem. Joe had heard that his brother might become paralyzed. Joe's mother was distraught with the news. Namath was upset about his family's unrest.

Namath casually asked Coach Weeb Ewbank for permission to go to New York that night on some personal errand. Ewbank suggested Joe stay right where he was. After all, a game was coming up tomorrow and if Joe were to be hit by a New York bus or mugged in Central Park, how would Weeb explain the loss to the press. While Namath was young and impulsive, Ewbank was gray-haired, experienced and conservative. He knew the right place for a football player in August was in his own boring dormitory. Weeb had never been more correct in his life. There is more to coaching football players than

drawing O's and X's on a bulletin board. The Giants, for example, took to the custom of feeding their players red meat and locking them up in a New York hotel the night before a home game. Nothing would make a football player more mean than being locked up in a Manhattan hotel with Manhattan under his feet for the taking. For this move, Allie Sherman, the coach of the Giants, was regarded as a genius. He also usually won.

Namath had dinner with his teammates. The roast beef was rubbery and the potatoes were mushy. This was too much.

Namath marched out of the dormitory, walked to his car and drove to New York City. When next seen, it was 3 o'clock in the morning and Namath was enjoying the free spirits and good drinks in a place called the Open End. Two of his companions were Mike Bite, his lawyer, and Art Heyman, a husky, handsome professional basketball player and part-time tavern owner. Heyman had once almost caused a new small civil war in the South when he played basketball, fought with players and officials and turned college basketball attention to Duke University during his tenure in North Carolina.

Namath, Bite and Heyman agree they were in attendance at the Open End in the early morning hours of August 4. Also in attendance, all hands agree, was a smallish, well-dressed man named Charles Parmiter, whose name could be found on the masthead of *Time*, *The Weekly Newsmagazine*, as its sports editor.

Namath, legal papers later stated, was intoxicated. Of course, what's intoxication for one man may only be a small flight for the next one. Most people in bars do drink. Namath admitted he was in the bar. Most juries would then have to convict him of drinking.

This was the scene. Namath, Bite, Heyman and several other young men were standing at the bar drinking. It was sometime after 3 a.m. So far it was all legal. Prohibition no longer exists. Bars in New York may stay open until 4 a.m. All parties were over twenty-one. Parmiter, all parties still agree, put his hand on the shoulder of Joe Willie Namath without invitation to do so. Par-

miter, unlike members of the opposite sex, had no free access to Joe Namath's shoulder.

The State Supreme Court of New York is still to decide what happened next. Parmiter alleged in a suit filed in court that he was then the victim of a "coordinated, vicious and cowardly attack" when Namath, Bite and Heyman propped him up against a cigarette machine. He was definitely not their brand.

Namath, in a countersuit filed in court, said the only contact came when "Parmiter put his hand on my shoulder while he insisted on talking to me and again when I brushed him aside to get him out of my way."

It was then, Parmiter alleged, that Namath shouted, "I don't need you \$100-a-week creeps going around writing about me."

Namath denied the remark. Reporters all over town were embarrassed. Not one of them was making under \$150. The New York Newspaper Guild saw to that in all its majesty.

Regardless of the issues, most working newsmen who covered Namath and the Jets could hardly be sympathetic to *Time's* man. The working newsman usually finds a sudden appearance by a Time-Inc.-type slightly nauseating on an everyday sports scene. The working newsman, a graduate of Hard Knocks U., finds little rapport with the Time-Inc. wet-nosed Princeton lads with their Vassar researchers. Newsmen are real people. Time's writers are generally skilled only in their unique art of group journalism. No story is complete without its little red check mark for accuracy. Still, they fill pages of their weekly letters columns with errors.

The classic story on Time-Inc.-ers, told by newspaper reporters who covered Roger Maris' magnificent 1961 home run season, was the lad from *Time*, depth reporting, who asked the Yankee slugger, "Do you play around on the road?"

"Play around? Hell, I'm a married man with six children."

"I'm a married man," said the *Time* tintype, "and I play around."

And people wondered why Roger Maris lost his hair in 1961!

Namath never denied he played around on the road. In the State Supreme Court of New York, he was denying, however, that he played around with Charles Parmiter's head.

By 4 a.m. the afternoon papers in New York were grinding out the details. Joe Namath, who had admitted publicly to Jimmy Cannon that he drank and went out with girls, was proving it again. He was also proving he stayed up late, sometimes the night before a football game.

Namath was back in Peekskill by the time the *Time* story had been digested by Ewbank, Sonny Werblin and the Jets players.

"Joe will play," said Ewbank. "That's all I will say about it."

In a short, emotional speech to his teammates, Namath apologized for leaving the camp, missing bedcheck and upsetting the players and coaches. Players who were at the meeting said Namath never got around to apologizing for his discussion with Mr. Parmiter. He came out of the clubhouse laughing. Then he went out against Boston, threw two touchdown passes, led the Jets to an easy win and rode home on the team bus. He was still laughing.

A month later the press and the fans were still discussing the Longest Night of Joe Namath. The issue was clear. Joe Namath was something else. People who wanted to see him play didn't know whether to buy a ticket at Shea Stadium or buy a drink at the Open End.

Namath was amused by it all. His business was football. Anything else was a sideline. The Jets opened the 1967 season against the Buffalo Bills in Buffalo, New York. The upstate New York town has two seasons, winter and July Fourth. This wasn't July Fourth. Namath had a bad day, was bothered by a tough Buffalo defense and couldn't hit the big pass at the right time. The Jets lost the opener, 20-17.

"It wasn't just Joe," said Ewbank. "It was everybody. We didn't play well. They played better. They hit harder and beat us up front. They beat us all over."

Namath was surprisingly subdued. He had completed 11 out of 23 passes for 153 yards, thrown two touchdown passes and had a 56-yard completion. It was not enough. His team lost. In three college years at Alabama, Namath had been involved in three losing football games. In his third year with the Jets, he had already experienced fifteen losses.

"You had a pretty good day," said a reporter.

"How could you say that?" Namath asked. "We lost, didn't we? The only thing that counts is winning."

"You didn't throw any interceptions," tried another reporter.

Namath looked puzzled. "Individual statistics don't mean a damn. The only thing you look at at the end of the game is the scoreboard."

As Namath spoke, his teammates studied the individual statistical charts. Maybe they didn't follow Namath's creed. One thing was for sure, they didn't completely follow Namath. He still wasn't their favorite football player.

His teammates had not yet voted him their own Most Valuable Player, an automatic honor usually reserved for a contending team's quarterback. Namath hadn't proved himself to his teammates. He certainly hadn't proved himself to the fans.

A strange thing was happening to Joe Namath. He was being booed at his home field of Shea Stadium. The Jets followed the Buffalo loss with a victory against Denver in Denver. Then they beat Miami and Oakland at Shea Stadium. Namath gained an astounding 415 yards in the air against Denver. He played a conservative game against Oakland's stubborn defense and threw only 28 passes with 9 completions.

Win or lose, pass or interception, limping or not, Namath became the target of the boo birds of Shea. This was an astounding sports fact. Shea Stadium, the home of the baseball Mets and the Jets, was known as a homer's field. Hometown players were almost never booed at Shea. Joe DiMaggio had been booed at Yankee Stadium. Mickey Mantle had been booed at Yankee Stadium. Everybody had been booed at Ebbets Field. No-

body had been booed at Shea. Inept players like Marv Throneberry and a squatly, little catcher named Choo Choo Coleman became folk heroes in the first few seasons of the Mets. All of that changed with the greeting Namath got. It was shocking. This wasn't Philadelphia. This was New York. The fans in Philadelphia would boo a funeral or an Easter egg hunt or a sculler. New York booed the special few.

That seemed to be it. In white shoes and green shirt, in football helmet and large number 12, Namath was disappointing them. Sure, he was doing it all off the field. Booze and broads and llama rugs. What about championships? That's what they really wanted. That's what Namath wanted. New Yorkers hadn't seen a world champion in anything since the Yankees of 1962. Now the Yankees and Mets were terrible. The Giants were losing in football. The Knicks in basketball and the Rangers in hockey were dog teams. Namath got the cash. Namath got the attention. Damn it, Namath was supposed to be a winner. They wanted a championship. What the hell did we pay you \$400,000 for anyway, Joe?

Larry Merchant of the *New York Post*, the Joe Namath of sportswriters, understood the scene.

"Many attend, few comprehend," he wrote in the *Post*. "The homo saps who boo him at Shea Stadium, presumably because he won't let them run barefoot through his white llama rug, are missing something special."

Namath and Ewbank were flying on separate beams. The coach wanted Namath to hold on to the football more often when his men were covered. Namath tended, because of his immobile legs, to throw into a crowd rather than digest the pigskin raw.

"I'd like to put the coach in my position," said Namath, "and see what he does."

"Aside from the delightful idea of having a five foot five inch and two hundred pound quarterback," wrote Merchant, "that remark might be taken as a reflection of Namath's super confidence or his fear of further injury."

Despite the knee operations, Namath was still not a complete football player. He never would be. At Ala-

bama the opposition never knew what to expect. He might pass. Then again he might not. He might rollout. Then again he might not. He might even crash into a crowd, swivel his way past the line of scrimmage and shoot downfield by himself for a touchdown. These were academic to the pro defenders who played against Namath. He could only pass. Period. He couldn't run. Hardly anybody else on the Jets could, as they labored to establish a ground game with veteran Bill Mathis, sophomore Emerson Boozer and journeyman Mark Smolinski. Matt Snell, the bruising fullback, had been lost for the season after the opening game, with, after all, a knee injury.

Until the Jets could establish an impressive ground game, Namath's passing alternatives would remain narrow. If the Jets could get those runners, they could become a championship team.

They had the receivers in sensational flankers George Sauer and Don Maynard and end Pete Lammons, the blockers up front and the good backfield protection from Snell, when he could play, and Mathis. Give Namath some running and he might show them.

Despite the booing on the field, Namath continued to be a big hit off the field. He was a man about town, a frequent diner at the better nightspots and a guest on various television shows. Johnny Carson pulled the sports show business coup of the year when he got Fran Tarkenton, the son of a minister, and Joe Namath, the son of a gun, on the same television show. Tarkenton, a Southern square with a lovely wife and sweet daughter, and swinger Namath, with only lovely girlfriends, were competing for New York's pro football ownership. Tarkenton was the scrambling man, the flashy, running quarterback of the Giants. Namath did it with his arm.

Carson, a serious football fan, was cordial to Tarkenton. He was charming to Namath. Carson was a friend of Sonny Werblin. Down deep, Carson wanted to grow up to be Joe Namath. He wished Sonny would hurry up and sign him to play the Joe Namath story. In real life.

Namath's fame off the field far exceeded his football fame. His name and face were recognized by people who

couldn't tell a football from a footrest. A couple of years after the Carson show, Namath was a guest on the Dick Cavett show. Another guest was sexy, leggy, sultry Jane Fonda. Jane Fonda was a beautiful girl. Jane Fonda was sexy. Jane Fonda smiled at him. Joe Namath was in love again.

"I've been away in Europe for several years," said the actress. "I knew the name Joe Namath. Everybody in Europe knows him. When I came back here, all I heard was Joe Namath. I heard a lot of things about him. I never heard that he played football."

Namath's mission, despite all his show business scene, was still winning football games. Everything flowed from that. The Jets were off to their best start since Namath joined them. They had won three games in a row after an opening loss as they came into a vital game against Houston.

The NBC television cameras were on Namath as he sauntered out under the goal posts, his white shoes dancing, his green uniform sparkling, his helmet held firmly under his arm the way a knight held his armor hat. Boos and cheers were about equal in volume as Namath moved toward the Jets bench.

It was a delightfully cool Sunday afternoon. Shea Stadium was packed regularly each game-afternoon now, and the Jets chowder and marching society had made the big leagues. *The New York Times* had taken notice of them in a long article. Joe Namath was doing so much for so many.

Madison Avenue was getting its great kicks from quarterbacking the Jets on Sunday and second-guessing Namath on Monday after being made strong and brilliant by a few martinis. On Sunday they booed because Namath wouldn't call the plays their way. On Monday they told their small world how much better they could have done it. Many of the mod squad, in their tight suits and wide ties, had a strange love-hate relationship with Namath. When he won, they experienced the thrill of a Corsican brother. When he lost, they booed him for failing them. After all, they had taken much abuse for buying Jets tickets when Giants tickets were unavailable.

The status thing was still the Giants ticket. The Jets had Namath but they hadn't won anything. The Giants weren't winning, either, but at least they had an impressive past.

Namath's knee was about as strong as it was going to be. His mobility had increased, and every so often, usually on a busted play, he would actually run a few yards. Not quite as well as he had run at Alabama, but better than he had at any time as a pro.

"I might start calling my own number more often," he kidded.

Namath was about to show just how agile he really was that Sunday afternoon in Shea against Houston. Houston had taken a 28-20 lead with less than four minutes remaining in the game. For a lot of teams you could put the game down as a loss and forget it. For a lot of quarterbacks, four minutes wouldn't be enough to get a first down, let alone score eight or more points for a tie or a win.

Now Namath went to work. A pass to the flat to George Sauer. A drive up the middle to Maynard for short yardage. Emerson Boozer crashing through the line. The clock ticked on its merry way; Namath moved downfield; the crowd became hysterical; and the Madison Avenue mod squad didn't know whether to sit or stand, boo or scream, drink or run.

"The thing about Joe in a spot like that," said full-back Billy Mathis, "is his complete calm and cool. When all the world is in shock, he's in control."

Namath wanted a pass play, into the corner of the end zone to Maynard. He called the play. The Jets moved to the line. He saw the Houston defense shift. He called an automatic at the line of scrimmage. Maynard was supposed to go to his left on the original play. Now he moved to the right. The ball was snapped and Namath jogged back, holding the football high, looking, weaving, waiting for that ultimate instant of exact timing. Now! He drilled the ball to his right as Maynard made a quick head roll and gained a step on the defender. Wham! The leather slapped into his hands and the lanky Texan pulled it lovingly to his chest. Touchdown. The Jets were

only two points away with ninety-seven seconds to play. They went for the two points to tie. Namath spotted Maynard examining the color of the grass in the left corner of the end zone and snapped the football to him. The Jets had tied Houston, 28-28.

The Oilers then had the ball until the final fifteen seconds of the game. Everybody seemed satisfied with the tie. Everybody but Joe Willie Namath. "Ties," said an old football wit, "are like kissing your sister." Namath wasn't about to take anything like that without a fight.

He had five seconds left to play in the game. That's time enough for a quarterback to get to the line of scrimmage, fall down on the ball, hug it to his bosom and spend the next seven days explaining how one bad break cost him a tie instead of a deserved win. Namath hated ties. On him. Or in a game.

He moved back to pass, cocked his arm for the throw, let the ball go from his own 39 yard line to George Sauer, scanned the crowd around it, and gulped as W. K. Hicks intercepted the ball for Houston on his own 25 yard line. Hicks collected the ball and started back toward the Jets goal line. The clock read zero seconds left to play. Still, there was Hicks driving back upfield, the ball still alive, still in play, still capable of turning a sister-kissing tie into a nobody-kissing defeat. He wiggled to the 35 as the Jets closed in on him. Now he was down. But the ball wasn't. Just before he fell, Hicks had lateraled to Kenny Houston, who went another ten yards, was crowded to the sidelines and passed behind him to Larry Carwell.

Now it was Carwell racing for a touchdown. Garland Boyette, a 240-pound lineman, was in front of him ready to throw a death-defying block on anybody who came near Carwell. Namath was between Carwell and the goal line. Maynard, who had gone downfield for a pass, was racing across-field to get into the play. Carwell danced on the line. Boyette lumbered in front of him. Everybody was puffing.

"That one cat, that ball carrier," Namath said, "he was really straining. You could see how tired he was. The blocker was so big he was coming at me full speed and

trying to run over me. You grab him, you keep backing up, you hope you can tumble everybody."

Now the ball carrier was four yards from the Jets goal. The blocker was driving at Namath; Namath was moving back; the ball carrier, still panting for breath, was watching the outside line and Namath and Maynard coming behind him and his own blocker. It was a wild scene of falling, tripping, grabbing, lunging, clumsy bodies.

"I went down," Namath explained, "and the blocker went down. And I grabbed what I could. And the ball carrier fell over the blocker and me. And Maynard fell over everybody."

The crowd poured onto the field. They watched Namath get up slowly, his face caked with Shea Stadium, his uniform looking like a center's, his eyes thick with mud, his hands wet and grimy, his neck muscles taut.

Namath sat in front of his locker when it was over with a terribly tired look on his face. He had thrown a record six interceptions, three resulting in Houston touchdowns, but had thrown 49 passes with 27 completions, one clutch touchdown, and one valiant tackle. Joe Namath had been all things to all people in one day.

Namath took a pair of scissors and aimed at the tape on his ankles. He cut his socks in half.

"Nice going, Joe, baby," he said.

It was that kind of an afternoon. He next reached into his locker, pulled out a box of snuff, stuffed a pinch into his mouth and washed it down with a drink of orange soda.

"Do you swallow that stuff?"

"I don't swallow any of it," he said.

Especially the football game. "You saved the game," said a reporter. "I didn't save it," said Namath. "The way our defense was playing I damned near lost it with those interceptions. I was ridiculous."

Six interceptions in a football game is not recommended to make a quarterback happy. Namath had made some mistakes ("You must remember," said Weeb Ewbank for the 600th time, "he is only a third-year man"), but had thrown some impressive passes and called a

splendid game. He was getting better. Most of all, he was damn exciting. His arm, his quick release, his ability to hit a pass receiver from almost anyplace on the field, were the talk of the town. What Joe Namath was, really, was exciting. People were paying good money to see him at Shea and spending afternoons at home against their wives' wishes to watch him on the boob tube. Joe Namath was worth it. He was turning on the country to NBC.

The Namath cult was growing in several directions at once. He was being written about, talked about, watched, listened to, studied, analyzed and, best of all, painted. LeRoy Neiman, the resident artist for Playboy Magazine, had become the official house painter for the Jets. He spent Sunday afternoons roaming the sidelines looking for interesting players and interesting sights to paint. His brush often began and ended with Namath and his huge number 12, his white shoes, his incredibly masculine face, his large hands, his stylish manner, his balance and rhythm and form.

"I think football players are really important people in our society," said Neiman. "They are the people that other people imitate."

Namath was just about impossible to imitate, but people were trying. They were failing, of course, but they were trying. Neiman was succeeding in showing Namath in his work.

"Football is a team game," said Neiman, "but the individual parts are what I am after. It reminds me of the time I ran with the bulls at Pamplona. You're in a mob but you're the only one that counts."

One of Neiman's favorites was Sherman Plunkett, the Jets' beloved 315-pound offensive tackle. Plunkett was such a huge man that all eyes were forced to focus on him.

"Plunkett is no longer a fat, amusing guy to me," said Neiman. "His stomach doesn't mean anything. He is more power than fat. He lets you look at him. There's a tribal proudness about him. He's very dignified."

Namath is the player who draws most of Neiman's attention. He sees him differently than the fans.

Namath was sitting on the bench once after a series of plays. He had been tackled hard and complained of a headache and double vision.

"I was struck by how alone a star can be amid all that confusion, like a celebrity at a cocktail party who can't find anyone to talk to because nobody wants to bother him."

Neiman understood Namath's psyche as well as any man had. "There is a new Namath," he said. "He's changing, acquiring taste, finding himself. A lot more is going to happen to him. He's interested in my work now but he'll pass me by. He's the first real playboy athlete of his generation. The pad, the clothes, the whole thing. Forget Paul Hornung."

It was Neiman's contention that Namath had the personality, the flair, the excitement of the real superstars. It all showed in Neiman's impressive gallery of Namath. There was Namath resting on a table, Namath shaving his legs before a game, Namath urging the defense on from the sideline, Namath's hair curling out from under his helmet, and finally Namath in his mod glory, continental blazer, turtleneck sweater, tight pants.

"Namath is going to have the impact of a Dempsey, a Ruth, a Sugar Ray," said artist Neiman. "If there was no Dempsey, the tough guy, there would be no Clark Gables. Toots Shor is the last of the Babe Ruths. I don't know how it's going to show, but Namath is an original in his class."

For better or for worse, for richer kids or poorer kids, Namath was becoming an influence in dress, talk, manner, lifestyle, far beyond that of any previous football player. The great football players of the past were known only for passes thrown or touchdowns scored or people knocked into kingdom come. What was there to know about the lifestyle of a Red Grange or a Sammy Baugh or a Sid Luckman or a Glenn Davis? In the fifties and early sixties the personality of the players began to count almost as much as their playing with the advent of in-depth journalism as a means of combating the closeness of television. The TV cameras changed the emphasis of reporting. The game was no longer enough. Television had that. The newspapers, especially the featurish after-

noon newspapers, the magazines, the sports journalism specials, all brought the whole person—in some cases, the real person—to the reader. Bobby Layne became a full person, a few beers and all. Then Paul Hornung, who loved his mother and every other female. Then a Jimmy Brown, whose dynamic physical skill and his off-field electricity carried him from touchdowns with the Cleveland Browns to starring roles in films. The ballplayers of the past were just ballplayers. The stars of the present were full people with all the weaknesses and strengths of all people.

Joe Willie Namath just did more than anybody else. And he did it with more flamboyance.

Namath followed the Houston tie with triumphs over Miami and Boston. The Miami game was a remarkable show, even against a newly formed expansion football team. Namath tried thirteen passes in the game. One was dropped. Another was tipped by a leaping defender inches from the hands of George Sauer in the end zone. The other eleven passes were completed for 199 yards, including one for 61 yards, and two touchdowns as the Jets smothered Miami, 33-14. Namath followed that with another good show against the Boston Patriots. He threw 43 passes, completed 22, collected 362 yards and led the Jets to another win over the tough Patriots, 30-23.

Pro football teams play on Sunday, rest on Monday and report to their home parks on Tuesday to nurse their wounds from the previous game. They start getting better by Thursday, get revved up on Saturday and grow their mad-dog faces by Sunday morning. Injuries are routine. The game is physical. Injuries are expected. Most of the time, unless bones are broken, they are little noticed. Except if the injured party is a quarterback. Except if the injured party is a quarterback named Joe Willie Namath.

Weeb Ewbank informed the press on Tuesday that Namath was complaining about an injured ankle.

"It's nothing," said Ewbank.

Nothing? Joe Namath's ankle is hurt and Weeb thinks it's nothing. One reporter called it a "major sprain." An-

other reported that it was too close to the right knee, the famous right knee, to be ignored. A third assured his readers that cold compresses, bandages and tape would cure everything. The world waited through the week. The bookies sweated. The Jets, with Namath, were small underdogs to the powerful Chiefs. Without Namath, it was an off-the-board game The bookies had to know. And quickly.

Wednesday afternoon Namath cleared things up for everybody.

"The ankle got twisted when somebody picked up a fumble in the Boston game and I got twisted up with the blocker," Namath said. "The ankle will be all right. I'm just worried about the knee. The injured ankle is putting a strain on the knee."

Now the bookies were really shook up. Would he or wouldn't he? The city was filled with little men who didn't know whether or not they should swallow their betting slips. If Namath didn't play they might be wiped out. They needed the action. Win or lose, they got the vigorish. Bookies need bets.

On Thursday Namath assured the world they could forget about him. "I'm all right," he said. "It still hurts but I'll play. Don't worry about me."

The Chiefs didn't. On Sunday the Chiefs were all over Namath, ran the Jets out of the ball park and beat New York, 42-18. "It wasn't the knee, the ankle, the Chiefs, anything," said Namath. "It was me. I was lousy."

The ankle and the knee held up as the Jets beat Buffalo and Boston and were upset by Denver despite a fantastic amount of passes thrown by Namath. He tried sixty passes, completed only 24 and had 4 intercepted.

He still was not quite the quarterback the Jets expected when they paid \$400,000. He was filling ball parks all over the American League, but he wasn't winning as often as everybody hoped. The jury was still out on Namath. Ewbank could honestly say Johnny Unitas was still his very best quarterback.

The last home game of the 1967 was against Kansas City. The Jets were beaten, 21-7. Namath was lucky he wasn't killed.

The Jets had acquired a running back (still trying to establish their ground game) by the name of Abner Haynes. He had once been a devastating runner. He was now finished. He got into the game with a few minutes left to play. Namath called his number and Haynes, on a draw play, charged for the line. When he got there, Buck Buchanan, a jolly giant of some 300 pounds, waited to hug him. Haynes thought better of it. He lateraled to Namath, who was merely watching the play like an innocent bystander. The next thing Namath knew he was staring up at Buchanan's sweaty belly button.

"I was amazed," Weeb Ewbank said after the game. "Haynes was setting Joe up to get him murdered."

"The man was hung up there," said Namath, referring to Haynes at the line of scrimmage with the football under his arm and Buchanan bellowing forward. "He looked at me and I saw in his eyes that he was going to give it to me."

"Were you surprised?"

"Would you be surprised if the egg jumped out of the skillet at you?" said Namath.

Haynes departed the following week to more peaceful surroundings.

Namath stayed around to complete the season with a three-touchdown game against Oakland and a four touchdown game against San Diego. The Jets lost to Oakland but beat San Diego big, 42-31. The year ended with the Jets at 8-5-1 for the season and Namath amassing the overwhelming total of 4,007 yards for a professional record. No quarterback, not Baugh, not Luckman, not Unitas, not Waterfield, not Layne, not Starr, not anyone had ever thrown for four thousand yards. In three seasons Namath had already proven he was the best quarterback off the field in the history of football. He was starting to look like he might be the best on the field too.

As he sat on the floor of his New York apartment, with his feet immersed in llama rug, Namath couldn't help feeling the year had been a marvelous one. It had started with the longest night. Now there wouldn't be a winter operation. It was ending with the shortest day.

1968: GO, JOE, GO

This time it was a real surprise. It was even the wrong knee.

Namath had spent the winter in Miami, in Alabama, in California, in New York, in Beaver Falls. He was here, there and everywhere. He was at a Florida track or a New York club. He was dining with his boss, Sonny Werblin, or with people a lot prettier than his boss. His favorite seemed to be a blonde (what else?) coed from Miami named Suzie Storm. She was around town a lot, seen in Florida with him, and was a sort of unprofessional answering service at his midtown apartment. A lot of girls came and went. Suzie stayed.

Namath's name was daily used in gossip columns. He was dating this actress and that, this showgirl, this busty beauty. So far, as the girls sighed, no marriage. Then one gossip column had an item: Joe Namath to have knee operation.

The sports guys read the gossip columns too. They checked with the Jets and got the standard answer. "Well," the team officials said, "Joe's knee has been bothering him and Dr. Nicholas is looking at it, and, well, we might have something to say later. . . "

In early March Namath underwent surgery for the third time in thirty-eight months. This time the tendon in his left knee was repaired. He didn't have bad knees any longer. Now he had no knees.

Namath went to Florida to recover. He recovered at the track and in some swinging nightspots. But he did recover. By June he was throwing around a football again. His legs were a little shaky but his arm was still fine. Namath would never be known as the man with the golden knees but he could still play football. There is a baseball player named Walt Williams, who is called No-Neck because his head sits on his shoulders. Nobody got around to calling Joe Namath No-Knees. Broadway Joe

seemed adequate enough. Would anyone ever go to a restaurant called No-Knees Namath's?

About three weeks before the Jets were to report to their new training camp at Hofstra College in Long Island, Namath received a call from Sonny Werblin.

"C'mon up to New York," said Werblin, "I want to talk about your contract."

Quietly, without any word to the press, Werblin signed Namath to a new contract. Joe's original pact still had a year to go. Werblin decided to tear it up, pay Namath a new bonus for signing and tie him up for three more years.

Soon, the reason was out. So was Werblin.

The dynamic leader of the Jets was having trouble with his partners. When Sonny purchased the team in 1963 with a syndicate consisting of himself; Donald Lillis, a Wall Street man; Townsend Martin, a banker; Leon Hess, an oilman; and Philip H. Iselin, president of the Korell Company, he was told by his partners to run the show. They stayed in the background as Sonny took full charge of the operation. Sonny flew across country signing players. (Sonny did have to sign others beside Namath to make a team.) Sonny charmed the press. Sonny made all the banquets. Sonny recruited his lovely wife to help him host a massive summer track and lawn party, the highlight of the sports set's social season. Sonny was in the press box, on the field, in the clubhouse. Sonny took all the knocks when Namath threw an intercepted pass. Sonny took all the abuse when the Jets failed to win. Sonny was the man who stood by Ewbank when the fans called for his head.

Now Sonny's partners shouted, "What about us?"

They had the money in the club. Now they wanted the press attention, the glory, the fun. The Jets were looking like a team that might win a title. They wanted their slippers filled with champagne.

"You buy me out or I'll buy you out," said Werblin.

With the money stacked against him, Sonny was the one to go. He made a handsome profit, signed Namath before he left and walked out in the sunset.

Donald Lillis became the president of the club. Shortly

After he took the job, he died. Philip Iselin, a personable and knowledgeable man, became the new president of the Jets.

The only thing Iselin had to worry about was Joe Namath's knee.

Namath came to training camp with a determined attitude. The third operation on his knee proved to be the least serious. He was bouncy, confident, driving almost from the start. Hofstra College had placed Astro-Turf on their field and Namath found the solid footing much to his liking.

There was something about the Jets camp in 1968 that indicated a new attitude. The novelty of Joe Namath had begun to wear thin. He would still lead the league in ink, he would still prowls the town by night and sleep by day; he would still be the single man's Everyman, but the game was the thing.

"The only thing I care about is winning," said Namath.

He had said it before. He had meant it before. This time he seemed to mean it more. There was determination in his every move, confidence in his every step. Joe Namath was a bachelor-playboy, all right. Joe Namath was a bungler, all right. Joe Namath did it all. But Joe Namath had never won a championship. That was the mission for 1968.

Even the heat of August seemed not to bother him. He went about his football business with poise and calm. He worked well with his receivers, he praised his blocking, he worked hard on his game films and his play calling. Somewhere, in the summer of 1968, in the dark, green artificial grass of Hofstra College, Joe Namath became a complete quarterback.

There were days, of course, when Joe Namath was being Joe Namath. Like the day he posed for pictures with his new mink coat. Or the day he threw some passes left-handed. Or the day he showed his teammates his latest acquisition: A beautiful new blonde.

Namath knew that all of this would be quite unimportant if he didn't win in 1968. He almost went so far as to try and play down his own image.

In an all-purpose interview with Dick Young, the dis-

tinguished columnist of the *New York Daily News*, Namath answered some professional and personal questions.

Q: Joe, what is your reaction to your playboy image?

A: I think, in all seriousness, that it's overplayed. I don't fool around nearly as much as what is made out to be. I go out, sure. I live in Manhattan, I'm a bachelor, but . . . it's built up too much, too big.

Q: Do you feel you have just the normal attraction for the opposite sex?

A: It has helped me as a football player, I guess, and being in New York. I meet more girls, different girls. Still, it's just a normal thing.

Q: What is your reaction when the fans get on you?

A: I get angry occasionally. Not during the games, because I don't hear them. Damn, when you stop to consider how much they know about the game, you figure it's their ignorance just yelling out. You throw a ball fifteen yards over a guy's head. They think it's a bad pass. It could be the guy's covered and you are throwing it away to avoid a loss.

Q: Do the fans shout personal things at you.

A: That's what bugs me. It's like, why is your hair so long. Why ain't you in the Army? You don't need a mink coat, you fag.

Dick Young had come up with a marvelous interview. There was one fact in his story that no one could dispute. Mink coat or not, Joe Namath was certainly not a fag. In journalese, this was not to be regarded as a scoop.

Young's interview had given Namath a chance to get some things off his chest about himself, the fans, the team, the chances of the Jets and several other matters. To his teammates, there was one important matter. That was winning. To win, the Jets had to have complete confidence in Namath's leadership. A pro football team is usually as good as the rapport between the quarterback and the players. As professional football is played today, the quarterback assumes a far more vital role in a team's success than just throwing passes and calling plays. Success, in a way, comes from the chemistry between the quarterback and the players. For the first three years of

the Joe Namath era, the chemistry was a little polluted.

Young's question was: Do you think some of the guys think you are aloof at times.

Namath's answer: Sure, I would think you would have to think that at times. It's human nature to figure that about someone else who is in a different position financially and publicity-wise. But most of the fellows know me now.

Q: It took a little while?

A: God, yes. The first year was ridiculous. They would say things like there was the big star, owner's pet, things like that.

Namath was being honest. The situation with the Jets had started badly because of the huge bonus and Namath's enormous publicity. There was a certain amount of jealousy because of the money. There was more jealousy because of the attention. Ballplayers live on two things: salary and ego. If the money isn't enough, they need ego. They are in show business and, like most performers, need acceptance and recognition from their friends and peers. If their friends won't do it, they will surround themselves with sycophants who will gladly handle the chores. Namath was a twenty-one-year-old rich kid when he joined a very poor team. Then he was fussed over, treated differently, entertained by Werblin, welcomed into New York's upper social strata, fawned over by the press and public. It was difficult for a muddy-faced lineman to feel *simpatico*.

This changed gradually as his teammates got to know Namath as a person. He was fun to be around and would share his money and his girls. He thought nothing of picking up a whole team's bar tab at a hotel. He would socialize with the lowest rookie on the team as easily as the other regulars. He had shown them he could win. In 1968, as the season approached, the relationship grew closer. The Jets knew they had a chance at the Super Bowl money: \$15,000 just for showing up; \$25,000 a man if they could pull off the miracle and beat the NFL. This was a shallow dream without a big season by Namath. It was distinctly possible with him.

Namath was now being accepted on his own terms.

He would march to his own drummer. But nobody had to march with him. He would play the best football he could, and what happened before and after games would be his business. His teammates could like his off-field antics and attitudes or not. They could take him or leave him. They decided to take him.

One of Namath's strengths was his relationship with black players. Under the surface, in the woodwork of a team's soul, this is always a vital question. Teams suppress the racist world they come from or die from the disease. Whether by the nature of the players or the drive for group success, winning and money, good teams eliminate racial animosity; bad teams don't. The St. Louis Cardinals baseball team integrated in its deepest heart. They won two straight pennants. The St. Louis Cardinals football team did not. They were consumed by the racist disease. The San Francisco Giants always had trouble because of black, Latin and white divergent elements. They won much less than their talent would indicate. The Green Bay Packers were one family of a single color, the personality of their quarterback, Bart Starr: bland. They won.

Namath, by nature, is a gregarious young man. He likes to be around people. If a player was on his wavelength he would be Joe's man, black or white, rich or poor, star or failure. Sports, at its finest, was one of the truest forms of American democracy. Namath helped create this around the Jets.

Namath grew up where there were no social or racial strata. Everybody was the same. Damn poor.

"We were kids together in that area," said Rich Allen, the great slugger of the Philadelphia Phillies. "Joe comes from Beaver Falls and I come from Wampum, just a few miles away. We played a lot of ball together as kids. Joe never had any trouble, black or white. If you were his man, you were his man. That was it. We have been friends a long time."

Allen held out at the start of the 1969 baseball season. He finally told the Phillies he would report to their camp in Florida. He didn't show up on time. He was finally discovered appearing at the grand opening of

Namath's Broadway Joe's restaurants in Miami.

"Joe's my friend," he explained to the Phillies. "He asked me to do him a favor so I did."

Winston Hill, the huge offensive tackle of the Jets, considered the good racial rapport on the Jets and attributed it to Namath.

"It wasn't always that way," said Hill. "But it is now. Joe is a symbol of the relationship between the black and white players. He's a good, friendly guy by nature. He just gets along with everybody."

Hill explained that some of Namath's early problems had nothing to do with race. They involved money."

"When Joe got here," said Hill, "he told us that he got all the money he could and he assumed we all did as well as we could. He said he didn't want to hear about the money. If anyone wanted to fight him he'd go outside with them, but inside, on the field, he just wanted to win."

They don't make many cream puffs in Beaver Falls. No player challenged Namath physically. Many, in his first days, challenged him mentally. Now four years later he proved that he would not hold his money over their heads. He would make it on his own. They would have to do the same.

"There won't be another one like Joe Namath," said Hill. "There won't be one like him, with his talent and individualism. Not in this century."

Now the air was clear. All that remained for the Jets, as they pulled together for the 1968 season, was to win enough games for a title.

The season began on September 15 at Kansas City. The Chiefs, who had been the American Football League's first Super Bowl representative against Green Bay, were still loaded with stars. Lenny Dawson had dominated the early days of the league and was still a formidable figure. But Dawson's time had passed. This was the era of Joe Namath. The Jets won the opener, 10-19.

"We didn't play that well," said Ewbank, "but we won. That's the mark of a good team. Most teams usually

win on their good days. Only great teams can win on a bad day. We won on a bad day."

The Jets beat Boston and prepared for their annual visit to their most unfavorable town. They were shuffling off to Buffalo. It wasn't July Fourth again.

Things happen to the Jets and Namath in Buffalo. Like fumbles. Like interceptions. Like dropped passes. Like seeping lines. Like falling runners. Buffalo had lost its quarterback, Jackie Kemp, in a pre-season knee injury, and its coach, Joe Collier, because of the foolish scrimmage. They should have been easy to beat. They weren't. They beat the Jets, 37-35.

On Madison Avenue the word was out. "Same old Joe. He can't win the big ones."

Ewbank, who knew he had better win if he wanted to keep working in New York, was a little edgy about the game at a midweek luncheon.

"There are games like that. A football team has to recover from it if it is going to show any championship caliber," he said.

"But, Coach, why Buffalo?"

"When I was at Cleveland," he said, "we couldn't beat Detroit. It happens."

Everybody would be in Cleveland and forgotten if the Jets didn't recover. They beat the Chargers the following Sunday, lost to the Broncos and prepared for the Houston Oilers. The team record was 3-2. A loss might just put the Jets away for another season.

Namath's knee was giving him a little trouble. Trainer Jeff Snedecker told Dr. Nicholas that Joe was complaining about the soreness. Dr. Nicholas examined it early in the week, decided to aspirate the knee and clean it and reminded Joe to pull his bandages a little tighter and go out there and win one for Weeb. There was no use winning one for the Gipper. Somebody had already done that.

The Jets were scheduled to leave on a charter flight at 11 o'clock Saturday morning for Houston for the game at the many-splendored Astrodome. At 11:30 the engines had not turned.

"Anything wrong with the plane?" asked an anxious portswriter.

"Nope, just waiting on Joe."

The players, the coaches, the writers, the owners, and a few favorite hangers-on waited patiently while Joe abbed it across Manhattan to LaGuardia Airport. Nobody said anything about the delay. At 11:45 Namath howed up on the plane. He had a huge grin on his face like a kid who had just been found with his hand in the cookie jar. He wore plaid pants, a blue lumber jacket and carried a small hat.

"I was looking for my hat," he whispered to one of the writers.

The plane took off and sailed into Houston. Later, the writers assembled for dinner in the hotel bar. Namath had already assembled there with a few of his friends, including Mike Bite and a magazine writer named Lou Sahadi.

"Let's go for spaghetti," said Sahadi.

Namath reached into the front pocket of his mod pants, pulled a hundred-dollar bill out, dropped it on the bar and walked out. His entourage followed. There was no announcement as to what would happen after spaghetti. Namath sat on a table in the hotel dining room as Jeff nedecker taped his legs. He kidded with his backfield coach, Clive Rush, and winked at Dr. Nicholas, who was supervising the taping. Namath's hair was thick and black. His eyes were clear. His face was dark with a stubbled beard. He leaped off the table, jumped up and down a couple of times and announced, "I'm ready."

The Astrodome, a magnificent building of air-conditioned splendor inside a humid city, was filled with creaming Texans. They came not to praise Joe but to bury him. A Houston win might put the Jets out of business for the year. This was one they just had to win. If they didn't, Namath might be booed right back to Beaver Falls.

Houston was a tough, physically strong, determined team. They led at halftime and sat on the lead most of the second half. With four minutes to go, Namath passed to George Sauer for a score. Now the Jets could settle

for that or try for a win. Namath went for broke. The next time the Jets had the ball, Namath tried for the win. He called a run up the middle. He passed against the sidelines. He sent his backs wide. He set up the big throw and hit Don Maynard for the winner. The clock read thirty-two seconds when Maynard fell across the end zone with the football nestled warmly under his arms.

"Joe was fantastic, marvelous, wonderful," said Weeb Ewbank. "He was everything you could expect from a quarterback today. He used his blocking perfectly; he was careful on his throws; he set up everything. He was just great."

"The blocking was fantastic," said Namath. "They gave me plenty of time. That's where the game was won."

In the lingo of the game, Joe was blowing smoke, praising his teammates, giving them glory so that he could urge them on to greater heights.

It was almost Casey Stengel at his best after winning a pennant for the Yankees. "I never coulda done it without my players."

Namath never coulda won without his blockers.

Ewbank was impressed because Namath had used the clock and his blockers with equal skill. The good ones can score most times. Only the great ones score late and leave the other guy with a handful of seconds. Johnny Unitas was the best at that. Namath was closing in.

The Jets won the next three games and flew out to Oakland for a joust with their old friends, the hard-charging Raiders. Ben Davidson, Ike Lassiter, and all the giants of the Oakland front were ready to dine on mashed Namath.

"Maybe," said Namath, "I'll disappoint them. I just won't show up."

The game was beginning at 4 o'clock in the East. The National Broadcasting Company was certain it would be over at 7 o'clock. They had an expensive special scheduled to start at that time called Heidi. In three hours, she was to become the most famous little girl in America. She was the first blonde to upstage Namath.

In the early days of the American Football League the NFL cynics put the new league down as a basketball league. They were saying the AFL quarterbacks just

threw the ball in the air, not knowing where it would land, and hoped for the best. There was no defense that could stop their passing. Things had changed. The defenses had toughened and the offense had to work harder. They worked very hard that day at Oakland.

The Jets had the Raiders beaten with ninety seconds to go in the game. It was to be another magnificent win. Still, the Jets only led by a couple of points and a lot of people watching the game on television in New York and around the country cared about the game. Curt Gowdy, broadcasting the game for NBC, started reciting the credits. He listed the engineers, the director, the producers and the camera crew. Then came a commercial. Most football fans sat back waiting for the commercial to end and the final seconds of the game to be played.

Instead of Namath, they saw Heidi. Instead of Oakland's Coliseum, they saw the green hills of Switzerland. Instead of Ben Davidson's mustache they got Heidi's old uncle's beard. Some raced to their radios. Some raced to the TV set and started switching dials in their confusion. Others just sat in their chairs and screamed at Heidi.

In those final ninety seconds, Oakland had scored twice and had beaten the Jets, 43-32, as nobody watched on television. It was almost as if the television camera had turned off the 1951 Giants-Dodgers playoff game just when Ralph Branca was throwing his final warm-up pitches in the bullpen.

By morning the story was front-page in every paper in the country. NBC had received thousands of telegrams, letters and phone calls from outraged football fans. They hadn't paid a penny for the game but they were screaming, "We Wuz Robbed" They had spent the football season sitting in front of their sets waiting for this one marvelous, dramatic ending. What did they get for their troubles? Heidi in the beer cans.

Finally NBC, with an enormous public relations faux pas on their hands, issued a strangely worded apology. They blamed the whole mixup on some unnamed vice president in charge of switching dials someplace. They said the sports director in charge of the program had tried to reach an executive for a decision on whether or not to

finish the game and delay Heidi or cut from the game and play Heidi. They wound up getting a busy signal on NBC's New York switchboard. Apparently the fans had started calling the network as soon as the game disappeared from their screens.

L'affaire Heidi was a blessing in disguise for the Jets. It took the attention away from the fact that they had lost to the Raiders. The Jets had just about locked up the Eastern Division title. They were probably going to play Oakland or Kansas City for the league title in Shea Stadium.

The Jets moved closer to the championship the following Sunday by beating San Diego, 37-15, on the coast. Two more games were left at Shea.

Namath, staying with a conservative ground game, an occasional pass, and masterful play calling under Ewbank's well developed game plan, led the Jets to easy wins over Miami and Cincinnati as the Jets locked up the Eastern title.

A strange thing happened in the Miami game. It continued in the Cincinnati game. The fans fell in love with Joe. There were always some who cheered his every move. There were others who booed his every move. Most did a little of both, depending on the play. Now they were shouting for him on almost every play as the Jets had the ball. "Go, Joe, go," they screamed. "Go, Joe, go." They stood up and waved downfield. They pointed toward the enemy goal line. Namath had finally won them over completely. The after-dinner scene, the white shoes, the \$400,000 bonus, none of that seemed to matter. Joe and the Jets were winning. That's what everybody cared about all the time.

With the fans showering their love on him and the "Go, Joe, go" ringing in his ears, Namath led the Jets to an easy 35-17 triumph over the Dolphins and a 27-14 win over Paul Brown's stubborn Cincinnati Bengals.

Namath celebrated the Eastern title by cashing a check for \$10,000 just for shaving his beard.

For several weeks Namath had grown a handsome goatee. In a few days, as the beard came in, several of his teammates joined him as the bearded brigade. End

Bake Turner settled for a mustache. As always with Namath, reporters crowded around him and discussed the beard.

"Why did you grow it?"

"Because I wanted to."

"How long will you wear it?"

"As long as I want to."

As soon as the story hit the papers and the pictures filled the magazines and the television sports news, Namath received a letter from Milt Woodard, the president of the American Football League. Woodard suggested that maybe Joe would like to shave off his beard for the good of professional football and the image of the league and apple pie and monism and all the rest. Namath managed to ignore the letter as the beard grew thicker.

Then a razor company came along and Namath decided he didn't like the beard anymore. The razor company decided Namath was worth \$10,000. With cameras grinding, public relations men beaming, script girls swooning, and partridges in pear trees, Namath shaved his dark facial hairs for ten G's.

A few hours later he faced the reporters at Shea Stadium. They had not been informed of the lathering Joe took, so were surprised to see his new, clean skin.

"Is this your new image?"

"It's not for image."

"Did the league make you shave it off?"

"There was a letter. That didn't have anything to do with it."

"Did it have to do with beards and hippies and long hair and all that?"

"I don't think there is anything wrong with beards and long hair," said Namath. "The greatest man in the history of the world had long hair and a beard. He wasn't a hippie, was he?"

It was time for Namath to go to work. He never so much as mentioned the name of the razor company.

"I don't think they wanted me to tell," he said.

It was reported that four agency men on Madison Avenue passed out the next day when that was shown to them in the newspapers. There was nothing in Namath's

shaving contract that said he had to use the company's razor or mention the company's name. That company should have a new contract writer.

A half a dozen other Jets kept their beards on for free.

"I'm wearing mine until we win the championship," said defensive back Jim Hudson.

"I'll shave my mustache right now, right in this room," said end Bake Turner. "Give me a bid. What do I hear. What do I hear?"

"Will you take a quarter?"

Bake Turner could sing and play a guitar a lot better than Namath. He just couldn't shave as well.

The season ended as the Jets beat the Miami Dolphins 31-7. The Jets had the Eastern Division title for the first time and now had to wait for a playoff between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Oakland Raiders. The winner would play the Jets in Shea Stadium. The winner of that would play the NFL winner in the Super Bowl in Miami.

Namath spent the following Sunday at home watching the Raiders clobber the Chiefs, 41-6. Now it was to be Oakland and the Jets for the AFL title. Namath's week was taken up with practice sessions by day and home movies by night. The home movies starred Ben Davidson, Ike Lassiter and the rest of the screaming meanies from the Oakland defensive platoon.

"Who runs the projector?" Namath was asked.

"I do. I majored in industrial arts at Alabama. I even ran one in high school. Audio visual aids it was called. I did it to get out of homeroom."

The movie sessions didn't bother Namath as much as the sudden, biting cold of the New York winter. One afternoon he stood on the sidelines at a practice session, a green stocking cap over his hairy head, a tight sweater under his football jersey and his pants legs tied in tape to keep out the wind.

"It's a funny thing about this cold," Namath said. "Johnny Sample told me cold weather is just in a player's mind. I wish he'd tell my toes."

The writers laughed. Three of them never got to hear the joke. They were too busy jumping up and down on the frozen turf at Shea Stadium.

On Sunday the weather in New York was bitingly cold but clear. This was just not the time and place to bother with weather. Joe Namath, Weeb Ewbank, all the coaches, all the players, as many of the fans who could sardine themselves in to the park at Flushing Bay, were there. Sonny Werblin, the man with the impossible dream, no longer an owner but a superfan, was there.

The college kids in the deep seats in Shea began shouting before any player came on the field. "Oh, who's gonna win, oh, who's gonna win, the people say? We're gonna win, we're gonna win, today."

Then across the park, rising out of the past of New York wins, "We're number one . . . we're number one . . . we're number——" The cheer was broken by the appearance of the players and the introductions for television. "At fullback, number 41, from Ohio State, Matt Snell . . . and at quarterback, number 12——"

The noise came quickly, drowning out the announcer's sounds, rising like the cheers of a new world, sounding as if all the subway cars in all the world were crashing overhead at the same time . . . across the field, moving to the center, now cutting sharply to his right, head down, arms pumping easily, knees bent, Joe Namath, football player.

The game, befitting a championship for a league of professionals, was ugly and vicious. There were hands and helmets flailing at all sides. Blood leaked from eyes and knees and scraped hands. Everybody, including Namath, played with headaches.

The Jets went ahead quickly when Namath hit Don Maynard with a overhead thrust early in the first quarter. Oakland tied it and Namath drove the Jets ahead again. The Raiders tied it 13-13. The Jets came back in the third quarter to move ahead, 20-13, as the crowd grew wilder. Less than fifteen minutes remained for a championship. Oakland answered by scoring the next ten points, moving ahead, maybe forever, at 23-20.

Would it all die here as it had so often in the past? Was Namath just another quarterback who couldn't win the real big ones? Was it all show and no go?

Then from the stands, softly at first, welling up, louder,

louder, louder still. "Go, Joe, go . . . Go, Joe, go. . . ." They were with him. They loved him. They wanted him to win, for them, for New York, for the Jets, for Weeb and Sonny and Phil Iselin, for themselves, but mostly for Joe Namath. He had come to earn their respect. It would have been cruel at this stage to fail.

Namath put on a show that will not soon be forgotten. He was bothered by his knees. His head ached. His finger had been stepped on early in the game by the huge lineman, Lassiter, and he yelled, "Ha, ha, look at your finger, I got you, I got you," to Namath. Now Namath forgot all that. He hit George Sauer for ten yards from his own 32. First and ten on the 42. He faded back, held the ball over his head, counted the attendance and saw his man. Don Maynard, wiry, quick, brilliant with his body and coordination, slipped his man for an instant and the ball came on a low line drive, whirling past a half-dozen men at their eye level, too fast, too quick, too unexpected to be halted at this moment. Maynard caught the football fifty-two yards away at the six yard line of Oakland. They could have quit then. Namath was boss. He never let them up. He looked for Billy Mathis on the next play, saw he was covered, turned to George Sauer, saw he was covered, and drilled the ball into Maynard's grabbing hands for the touchdown. The Jets kept the Raiders away from a score and New York won, 27-23, for its first AFL championship in the history of the league.

The Jets clubhouse was a Roman orgy sans girls. They would come later.

Champagne bottles popped, despite a league ban, and Namath drank his share, bathed in it, doused his teammates, doused reporters, enjoyed the exuberance of the moment. He was twenty-five years old and he had taken the Jets to a thrilling league victory.

Namath stood on a bench and yelled across the room to Don Maynard. "Are you ready for Baltimore?"

"Joe," said Maynard. "I'm always ready."

"Me too," Namath said. Then he took a deep swig of the breakfast of football champions. "On to the Super Bowl."

The Jets had won the AFL championship but they

hadn't beaten anybody. They were the best in the brother-in-law league. Now they would meet some men.

It was on to the Super Bowl, all right, for Namath and the Jets, but first they would spend a week with the gals and the moon over Miami. It would take Florida a long while to recover.

9

SEVEN DAYS UNTIL SUPER SUNDAY

In the first week of the reign of Sonny Werblin over the New York Jets, not even Truman Capote gave bigger and better parties. Werblin set out to undo all the evil that had been done with the New York American Football League franchise. He would win the press first and build a team second. He would party with the writers in Toots Shor's. He would party with them at 21. He would party, best of all, with them at the Monmouth Race Track and his Jersey Shore club. This was the king of all New York parties. Parties became as much a part of the Jets scene as Joe Namath.

So a couple of nights after the Jets beat Oakland and a couple of days before they were to leave for Miami, there was a party. Sonny was out. His parties weren't.

The new boss, Phil Iselin, invited the press to share the joys and triumphs at a large party in the Diamond Club of Shea Stadium. The players and their wives were invited, the press was invited, and many of the superfans around the Jets were invited. There were drinks before dinner, during dinner and after dinner. Then came the speeches.

Iselin stood up at the front of the room and thanked the writers for sharing this very happy moment with him.

"We are delighted you could come," he said. "This is an informal evening so we just want to thank you and wish you all a good time. We hope we bring back the Super Bowl from Miami."

The club was taking the wives of the players to Florida as a fringe benefit. The wives of the writers had to pay their own way. That's why most didn't go.

Iselin called on several players to express their sentiments about the championship. One of the last called on was Gerry Philbin, the brutish, talented, all-league defensive end of the Jets. Philbin walked to the microphone and began talking.

"This has been a great year for all of us," he said. "We are very proud of winning the championship and we hope we can win the Super Bowl. That's what we are going down there for."

Then Philbin decided to add a little something to his speech.

"I think the wives of the players are as much responsible for this victory as anybody. They put up with us all season and I want, on behalf of all my teammates, to thank the wives of all the players."

The wives were touched. Some bent their heads a little shyly.

"Thank you, Gerry," said Iselin, "and now a final word from our quarterback, Joe Namath."

Namath walked to the microphone and the room grew still. The wives studied him and silently compared him to their own football player at home, the guy who threw his dirty shoes on the clean rug. Would Joe Namath do that? On his llama rug?

"That was a nice speech," Namath said, "thanking the wives, and all. Me, I just want to thank all the broads in New York."

And the Jets were off to Florida.

After working out for a week at Shea Stadium, studying the films of the Baltimore Colts in action and getting ready for the title game, they were flown to Fort Lauderdale for the final Seven Days Until Super Sunday.

No sports event in America has the coverage that the Super Bowl has. Writers, columnists and editors journey to Florida. TV and radio stations begin getting excited long before the game. The Jets were quartered at the Galt Ocean Mile Hotel. It hardly looked like the proper place for a football team to prepare itself for the biggest game of the season.

Namath knew how to ready himself for the big game. He sat in a lounge chair at the hotel, doused himself with

suntan oil, ogled the pretty girls, kidded with the sportswriters, charmed the old ladies, encouraged the old men, and built the drama of the event all by himself.

The biggest day of Superweek, outside of the game itself, is Monday. That is the day the reporters gather around for their first press conferences with the coaches, their first estimation of which one will help the writers, their first look at the two leaders in action. Then the writers and the photographers are turned on to the players for notes, quotes and anecdotes. And for thousands of posed pictures. Each paper would be sure to use one, usually the same one on the wire service, snapped by accident by some lucky photographer who happens to be around when Joe Namath bends down to tie his shoelace.

Don Shula, the handsome young coach of the Baltimore Colts, had been a fine player for Baltimore. His coach was Weeb Ewbank. Now Weeb Ewbank was back shooting for another championship.

Ewbank was not a colorful personality. He was a Paul Brown product, and like Brown, he believed football games were won on the field, not in the newspapers. The newsmen didn't care where they won. They knew they had to be played out in their pages. When he joined the Jets, Wilbur Charles Ewbank was a great find for Werblin. Weeb had been a champion and could build another champion. Still, like everything else around the Jets in the early days, Weeb had to sell tickets. One of the ways he sold them was with his name. The Jets took radio ads that went, "What kind of a name is Weeb?" It was meant only to cause interest in the coach, in the team and in the possibilities of the new franchise.

Weeb went along with all the gags. He contented himself with knowing that he was building a winner. He didn't care that some writers called him "Weebank" or that they referred to him as "The Jolly Green Midget" because he wore baggy green football pants at all the Jets workouts and had a Santa Claus figure. He knew the only thing that mattered, the only thing that gained respect, whether you were built like a firehouse or a fireplug, was winning. That's what he was in Florida for.

"We have a fine football team," Ewbank told the writers.

The newsmen knew that wouldn't sell any papers. This looked like another day Namath would have to save them. "Where's Namath?"

It was 10 o'clock on Monday morning, seven days before the Super Bowl, and Joe Namath was among the missing. While more than two hundred reporters, columnists, editors, television men, radio broadcasters and Superfans waited, Namath failed to show up. A picture-taking session had been scheduled and every player was instructed to be there. It read in their contract, right there in black and white, that they had to cooperate in public relations, for the good of the league and the team.

"Where's Joe, Weeb?"

"Uhh," said Weeb, "he isn't here. He's supposed to be here. They are all supposed to be here."

Namath had skipped out of the Jets camp the year before and had been fined \$250. Now the writers wanted to know what this would cost, standing up the writers and all that. Some coaches might have put extra money in a player's pay envelope for a performance like that. Weeb had better public relations sense.

"I'll have to talk to Joe," he said.

He had to talk also to Matt Snell and Emerson Boozer, two of Namath's backfield teammates. They weren't there either. Nobody got too upset about it. A few writers actually never missed them. They had come to Florida for one purpose and one purpose only. They wanted to see Joe Namath. They wanted to know: What hath the American Football League wrought?

Billy Mathis, the fine running and blocking back of the Jets, and one of the good-looking bachelor buddies of Namath's, was asked if he knew where Namath was.

"No, I don't," said the affable Southern gentleman. "Have you tried his bed?"

It was 10 o'clock in the morning and Mathis knew that Joe Namath just wasn't morning people. No way.

"You know if it was eight o'clock or if it was three o'clock Joe would probably be here. It's those in between times that are really rough on him."

A few of the older, establishment reporters were upset at Namath's nonappearance. The general attitude among them was "Who the hell does he think he is?" The younger reporters, the ones most hip to Namath's scene, knew that Joe was marching again to his own drummer. That's just the way things were. If reporters wanted to see him they would have to see him at his convenience. There were some threats of journalistic crucifixion or even worse. Some promised not to mention his name. Ewbank, to his credit, maintained his calm. He was in Florida to win a football game. He knew Joe had to be in the right frame of mind to do his best. Weeb wouldn't push him. He was being pretty cool for a sixty-one-year-old grandfather.

There was only one guy around that was any cooler. While the reporters sweated in the Florida heat and Ewbank spent his time easing Joe in and out of situations, Joe Namath slept the sleep of the innocent in his air-conditioned hotel room.

While Namath slept, the tone of the week was set. Namath was going to upstage all other aspects of the game. Vince Lombardi dominated the first two Super Bowls. Bart Starr was on the field long enough to win the awards, but Lombardi still was the figure who remained vivid in everyone's memory long after the games had faded.

As the week progressed, more and more would be written about Namath and less and less and less about any other player, coach or hanger-on. It almost didn't pay for a show business leech to show up. Namath was the only actor in this play.

As events of the future were to show, Namath had a fierce loyalty. He befriended his friends and snubbed his enemies. His friends among the press were the New York writers. They supported him and encouraged him. They accepted him on his own terms. If he was to sleep through a press session, they would write about it for fun and interview somebody else. After all, by God, they were only dealing with a game. The out-of-town writers had a different approach. Their readers had read thousands of words about this smart-aleck New York quarterback in

magazines and wire-service stories. Now they wanted the real truth from their own man's hand. How could their own man tell it like it was, when Namath wouldn't even show up.

The battle lines were clearly drawn. It was Joe Namath, the pride of New York, against the world. Now all the New-York-haters at least had a peg to hang their jealousy on. Bridgeport and Dayton would rise in all their fury to smite this smartie.

On Super Tuesday, Namath was available for interviews. They were held, unlike most interviews, in a lounge chair at the Galt Ocean Mile Hotel, the Atlantic Ocean beating against the breakers, the sun glaring through Joe's dark glasses, the writers sweating in their tight shirts and ties, the drinks sitting idly by, the tension building between Namath and the press.

An interview with Namath, when he is in the right mood, is a marvelous show. He answers some questions with honest convictions. He answers some questions with a put-on. He answers some questions with a question. He is charming, witty, gregarious. He is quiet, moody, withdrawn. He might laugh at one question. He might curse at the next. His interviews, like his life, are never boring.

There was a back and forth banter for a while. Namath was pleasant and entertaining. There were some kidding references to his failure to appear at the previous day's session. Joe admitted the fine, if it came, would not bankrupt him. The New York writers had softened him up. Now came the question, the moment, the statement that might have turned the entire Super week and Super Bowl game.

"How will you do against the Colts?"

Namath came right back with the answer. There was no hesitation, no delay, no thinking about it, no doubts in his voice.

"We'll beat them," he said clearly.

A few pencils dropped. A few snickers were heard. A few writers laughed. After all, the Baltimore Colts were the champions of the National Football League. Namath was good, all right, but he had only won the championship

of the little kids league. Now he was playing the big boys.

"You expect to beat them?"

"Hell, yes," said Namath. "We have three or four quarterbacks in our league better than Morrall."

Earl Morrall, the quarterback of the Colts, was the Most Valuable Player in the NFL. He had come from the Giants before the season started, replaced the injured Johnny Unitas and led the Colts to an easy championship.

"Daryle Lamonica is a better quarterback. So is John Hadl. There are two or three others," he said.

Joe, just too humble to say so, never mentioned the quarterback of the New York Jets.

The Colts were seventeen, eighteen, or nineteen-point favorites in the game, depending on your bookie. Now Namath was saying the bookies, who are almost always right, didn't know what they were talking about. Was Joe just blowing smoke?

Sports sections across the country bannered Namath's opinion. It shocked the NFL fans. It surprised the AFL fans. It frightened the Jets coaches to panic.

"I was pretty upset when I read it," said Ewbank. "That kind of talk never helped a team before. It usually makes the other team try just a little harder. I honestly wished Joe hadn't said anything like that. Then, as the week went on, I wasn't so sure it didn't help us."

Larry Grantham, linebacker of the Jets, wasn't upset when he read it.

"Everybody felt that way," he said, "except Joe said it publicly. We've all been around Joe long enough not to be surprised by anything he says."

Gerry Philbin, the key to the Jets defense from his end position, agreed with Namath that the Colts could be beaten.

"We watched them in films. We realized that they weren't that good. Joe got a lot of attention, of course, but the defense had a hell of a year. We weren't afraid of them. Maybe they would be afraid of us."

As the week went on and Namath never budged an inch from his feeling that the Jets were the better football team, Ewbank had to smile a little bit.

"I realized that Joe had made Baltimore think a little more about us," he said "I came to understand that maybe they would go into the game a little scared of us. Joe had planted some doubts. Maybe they weren't as good as they thought. And maybe we were better than they thought."

The New York papers were exploding the myth of Baltimore's invincibility. Namath had said it could be done. The out-of-New-York papers were busy charging Namath with the worst of all American sports crimes: Brashness. They ripped into him with vengeance. He had attacked the Baltimore Colts, apple pie, the NFL, the American flag, Earl Morrall, mom, the Baltimore defense, and chicken soup. Namath would be shot at sunrise. The Baltimore front four, especially the incredibly huge Bubba Smith, would eat him up, digest him and spit him out in little pieces. Sic transit Namath.

In the early hours of Super Wednesday, Namath threw more oil in the fire.

It started out as a leisurely evening. It almost ended with World War III.

Namath and his roommate, Jim Hudson, had decided to go to a restaurant and lounge in Fort Lauderdale known as Fazio's for a quiet evening of drinks and dinner. The practice sessions had been made, and the mental fatigue of staring at films of Baltimore each day had been wearying. Earl Morrall passing wasn't that thrilling to watch. Bubba Smith charging was impressive, all right, but no lineman ever made a tackle from the seat of his pants. That's where the Jets blockers were convinced they would keep Smith all game. Namath had announced the Jets would win. Now it was becoming contagious. Each player on the team, in his turn, decided in his heart that he could out-play his Baltimore man. A football victory is the composite result of the better execution of his duties by every man on the winning team against his man on the losing team. Namath had promised he would beat the Baltimore pass defenders. Now each man was announcing he would beat his man. The Jets offensive line promised they would handle Bubba and his brothers. The defense would handle the Baltimore line. The pass defenders would blanket the

Baltimore receivers. The Jets receivers would put away the Baltimore defensive backs. It was steamrolling throughout the team.

Namath and Hudson sat down to dinner to discuss all this with a couple of friends. Fazio's was a fine restaurant which provided some excellent entertainment. Namath, as was his custom, would provide even better entertainment.

Namath and Hudson sat at the bar, talking about the game and watching the musical interlude. Several of the Baltimore players, including Lou Michaels, the skilled place kicker of the Colts, had chosen this same night and this same restaurant to relax. It was a fitting scenario for a Grade B thriller.

Michaels, a thirty-one-year-old 250-pounder, who had been in professional football for eleven seasons, was the brother of one of the assistant coaches of the Jets, Walt Michaels. Several stories had been written about the difficulty their mother was having in picking a winner. Neither Walt nor Lou would comment on the rivalry and both promised not to bring the game up in their chance meetings until it was over. In fact, nobody really wanted the game brought up until it was over. Especially in Fazio's. This was a place for fun, and that was really why Namath, Hudson, Michaels, and the others were there. Some fun.

Namath and Hudson were discussing the game among themselves when Michaels, seated at the other end of the high bar with handsome red cushion chairs, was pointed out to them. Namath and Hudson began to talk a little louder about what they would do to the Colts and how much fun it would be spending the money from their Super Bowl victory.

Michaels sat at the end of the bar, studied his drink, and swallowed hard. First it was just a little annoying. Now it was aggravating. Now it was just impossible to take the bragging any longer. Who the hell was this guy Namath anyway? Lou Michaels was the key man in the Colts offense. Baltimore played a conservative game. Their idea of an offense was to get three or four yards on a run, get a few yards on a pass, move downfield with slow, sure steps, and then finally, when the opposition had grown stubborn about the last twenty yards or so,

send Michaels in to kick a field goal. Some teams would run you to death. Others would pass you to death. The Baltimore Colts would field goal you to death. They would do it early and they would do it efficiently. Lou Michaels was the name of their game.

Namath's bragging had been as much an insult to Michaels personally as it was to the team as a whole. He was their high scorer. Namath was saying they couldn't outscore his passing arm. The Jets had a fine field goal kicker in Jim Turner but they also had Namath. If the two kickers broke even, Namath could win over Morrall. It was that simple. Michaels didn't expect anybody to kick as many field goals in the Super Bowl game as he would.

Suddenly, as the conversation grew, almost without warning Michaels and Namath were going at it arm to toe. Namath was telling Michaels that the Colts were really the team that didn't have a chance. Michaels was telling Namath that he had a big mouth. Namath was telling Michaels that his team was a fraud. Michaels was telling Namath that they didn't belong in the same ball park and that Joe better learn some respect soon or he would have to show him some.

In the confusion, there was a physical challenge. Nobody really remembered in the heat of the night, the lightness of the heads, or the noise of their own voices, who challenged whom. But somebody did.

The crowd had grown to something less than a Shea Stadium Sunday football afternoon gathering, but it was large. Like at Shea, they were calling for violence. A handful of outside agitators were more than willing to hold coats for all parties concerned.

Only a last-second quick move would avoid a public brawl. Things were pretty hot. The best kicker on the Colts and the quarterback of the Jets might put each other out of the game. How would the bookies respond to that one? Would Weeb cry? Would Don Shula slit his wrists? Read all about it in the *New York Daily News*. Page three. Right there, next to the rapes, riots, robberies and ax murders.

And then Joe smiled. It was over. He had made his point. He had psyched another Colt. He had Michaels

more upset about Joe Namath than about the wind speed, the football and the charging Jets lineman. Now it was time for peace. Namath didn't need unconditional surrender. He had won the war without a shot being fired. Joe pulled a hundred-dollar bill from his pants.

"Everything's on me," he shouted. "Let's have another drink."

Michaels surrendered to that. He had another drink. So did Joe. So did Hudson. So did everybody else at the bar—on Joe.

By Super Wednesday morning the newspapers had the story. Joe Namath made news whenever he moved from the privacy of his room. Fort Lauderdale had been famous for college boys climbing street poles. This was where the girls were. This is where the boys were. The Elbo Room, where the kids hung out in Fort Lauderdale at the corner of A1A and Las Olas, would have only one topic of conversation that week. Broadway Joe Namath. He was cool. He was groovy. He was young. He wore long hair. He drank. He didn't listen to his elders. He had his own scene. He was one of them.

Morrall was a family man who wore a crew cut. He was thirty-four years old. He was square as hell. None of the kids could identify with him. None of them wanted to. The baldheaded, pot-bellied old guys in the fancy seats might like Morrall. They might even bet on him. But the kids—and Fort Lauderdale always seems overwhelmed by them—were with Namath. Every little edge counted.

On Super Thursday everybody paid attention to football. The Jets had a spirited workout, and the reporters could see they weren't passing out with panic at the prospect of facing the Colts. Their defense was alive and alert. The offense seemed to have the timing necessary for a good effort. The coaches were running the operation smoothly. The Jolly Green Midget was bringing along his football team just fine for a maximum effort.

"I watched the Baltimore films quite a lot," said Weeb. "I've seen some things. We'll be ready for them. I'm sure they will be ready for us. It will be a fine football game."

Weeb's quick mind had calculated the situation. He

knew exactly where the Colts were weakest. He had discovered, by God, that they were weakest where the world said they were strongest. They didn't have to be finessed. They could be run at. They could be passed over. They could be out-charged up front and out-run in the back. Weeb's game plan would be a brilliant piece of plotting. It would be a success if the Jets did their thing, each and every man. All they had to do was execute. On Super Thursday they certainly looked like they would be ready for the challenge.

"You can't tell anything about a team from its practice," Ewbank said. "Some teams practice well and play lousy. Some don't practice well and play good games. Individuals are different. Some days they will run hard and be determined in practice. Other days they are bored. It's just better if everybody practices hard. It just gets them into good habits."

So much of sports is psychology. Talent is often quite equal. The difference between losing and winning was often motivation. Namath had provided some of the motivation with his calculated and controlled arrogance. Weeb was providing more with his call for brilliance in execution.

"We had pride," Gerry Philbin said. "We knew we were a damn good football team. That was enough incentive. We wanted to prove it to the Colts and to the world."

Namath's psychological coup was complete when the Baltimore Colts began responding. Namath had, even before the game, put the Colts on the defensive. It was to be his single most important weapon in the game. Baltimore no longer wanted to beat the Jets and win the Super Bowl. They wanted to humiliate Namath. They had actually lost all their sense of values. They had completely forgotten that they had come to Florida to play the Jets. They now thought they had come to Florida to embarrass Joe Namath.

Bobby Boyd, a baldheaded thirty-year-old defensive back for the Colts, showed his motivation for the game when he was interviewed about his task in stopping Namath. Good defensive backs—and Boyd was a great one—never lose their cool, on or off the field. They must

read the passer's eyes, study their receivers, watch their zones, concentrate on the football, the man and the yard stripe all at once. They are the best athletes on a football team. The defending backs were long regarded as the difference between the NFL and the AFL.

"Anybody can throw long," Weeb Ewbank once said, "but only the great ones can pass long."

Passing long meant completing long. Unitas had done that constantly in the NFL. Unitas had achieved it against NFL defensive backs. Namath had done the same thing in the AFL. But, the argument went, he had achieved it only against AFL backs. Nobody had expected him to do the same against NFL backs.

Boyd took up the gauntlet after Namath threw it down. He was about to convince himself and the world that Namath had really done nothing. He had never beaten Bobby Boyd with a down and out. He had never beaten anybody in the NFL with a pass. He couldn't be much of a quarterback just because he could "throw" long. Could he "pass" long on NFL backs?

"I don't think he can," said Boyd. "Nobody in the NFL has completed a bomb on us all season."

Boyd admitted some passes had been completed against the Baltimore defense. He denied that any long pass, any breakaway touchdown, against them, had been made.

"I just don't think he can do it," he said. "He has a good arm, quick release and all that. But he won't have the time to throw he had in the AFL. He has taken three and four seconds to get rid of the ball. Do you think Bubba will give him three or four seconds to get rid of the ball."

Namath had the Colts watching the films for his bombs. His arm was the talk of football. He could drill a forty, fifty, even sixty-yard pass like a line drive in baseball. He had done it constantly in the AFL. But, of course, that was the AFL.

"He won't get a bomb on us," said Boyd.

As terrorists have proved the world over, the threat of a bomb is more effective than a bomb itself. Namath had planted the idea firmly in the heads of the Baltimore backs. They were psyched to stop him from getting a long

one thrown past them. He would switch to lighter weapons and keep the bombs in his bomb bay.

By late afternoon on Super Thursday the game had been conceded to the Colts. A poll was taken among the more than two hundred reporters covering the game. Twenty-three had given the Jets a chance. Eighteen of them from the New York area. They had seen Namath play. Of the ones who had not given the Jets a chance to win, only twenty-eight had ever seen Namath play.

"I've never seen him play," said one loud, boorish reporter from Texas, who lived and died with his Cowboys. "But how the hell could he be any good with a big mouth like that?" The same held true for that reporter. He never had a chance to find out just how good Namath was. He never recovered early enough from Saturday night to make the Sunday game. He might have been the same guy who went to cover the opening of a play, left before the final curtain, wrote that the play was dreadful and missed covering the fire that burned the theatre down before the finale.

Namath's prediction of victory had actually turned some of the reporters off the Jets. There were many reporters from AFL teams who came to Florida expecting to pick the Jets to win. They had seen Joe demolish their own teams. They had learned to respect the level of play in the AFL. They were certain in their own minds that the AFL did belong on the same field with the NFL. The only thing the AFL had proved in the previous two Super Bowls was that it couldn't beat Green Bay. Neither could the NFL teams. Now Green Bay was nowhere to be seen and the Jets had a chance.

They changed their minds as the week built. Namath's cockiness was too much. He had violated the code of the road. He had been disrespectful to Baltimore and they would probably kill the Jets. The Washington Redskins had once called the Chicago Bears "crybabies." The Bears cried all the way into the end zone each time in a humiliating 73-0 win over the Redskins. This is what was going to happen to the Jets. Everybody, just everybody knew it. That was on Super Thursday.

On Super Friday the Jets won a football game. All that was left now was to play it.

Earl Morrall could take it no longer. The newspapers in Miami and the rest of the country kept repeating and repeating in various forms Namath's crack about Morrall. Namath had convinced all who would listen that Morrall was only the fourth or fifth best quarterback in football. Everybody knew, of course, that Joe meant Joe was best. Bud Hadl? Lamonica? Lenny Dawson? Rookie Bob Griese? That was too much for Morrall to take.

This was the last day for serious stories. The next day's editions would be devoted to generalities like the size of the band, the size of the crowd, and the weather. If Morrall had something to say he had to say it now or forever hold his football. He said it.

"We are the best team in the National Football League," he said. "I fully expect to win on Sunday. We have watched the Jets defense on films. I don't see anything particularly difficult or surprising in their setup. We have faced a lot better teams this season and come out all right. They say we are big favorites. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't be."

Morrall had taken the bait. He had joined Boyd, Bubba Smith, Michaels and all the rest of the Colts in answering Namath's challenges. One thing a good team never does is respond to the printed word in print. There is only one answer, and that alone, until a game is played. That answer is silence. Then a good team goes on the field, wins big, and spends the rest of the season reading and rereading its post-victory quotes. Maybe Baltimore wasn't that good a team.

Weeb Ewbank began using Namath and the newspapers by Super Friday.

"Maybe," he told his team, "we have put a little extra pressure on Morrall."

Earl Morrall had always been a number-two quarterback. Joe Namath would bring out all his insecurities on Sunday. He would be number two for life after that one.

On Super Saturday, Joe Namath rested his mouth.

He sat by the pool at the Galt Ocean Mile, told the writers he was unavailable and surrounded himself with

some delicious blondes. Even the most boorish of reporters wouldn't interrupt this scene for a quote about the game. Whatever was going to be said, was said. Now it was time for Joe Namath to rest on his words. He would have all Saturday afternoon and a lot of Saturday night to forget the game. He would have several blondes around to help him forget. All of his real friends, Joe Hirsch, Ray Abruzzese, Mike Bite, Jim Hudson and the rest would share the evening.

Most of the Jets players separated to various parts of Fort Lauderdale for dinner. In groups of twos and threes they dined in the better Fort Lauderdale restaurants. They were all convinced of one thing. Namath had set the perfect tone for the game.

"We felt that we would win," said Gerry Philbin. "We were not overconfident, but we were sure of our ability. We had beaten some pretty rough football teams over a long hard season. We were ready to do it one more time."

Ewbank went over his last-minute plans, refining, honing, adjusting, working late to plug all loopholes and plan for all eventualities. He was ready to win. He told his team so the final meeting before the game.

"When we won the AFL championship over Oakland," said Weeb, "several of the players had lifted me on their shoulders. The pulling, tugging and dragging had injured my hip. I had been walking with a cane. I didn't want any of that again."

"I don't want anybody lifting me up like that again," he told his team. "When we win, just make a bosun's chair with your hands and carry me off that way."

Weeb Ewbank expected to ride again. Joe Namath was his winning horse. And everybody knows, in football, you've got to have the horses.

THE SUPER GAME

More people watched Joe Namath go to work on Sunday afternoon, January 12, 1969, than had ever watched any single man before. Any married man, too.

A week of Namath-watching in all of the newspapers in America had created more excitement than a football game is entitled to have. The football fans cared, of course. But the non-fans cared as well. Women all over America joined their husbands in front of the television set. Togetherness had come back to America after years of moral breakdown. Joe Namath was doing more to save American marriages that Sunday afternoon than the pill. Namath had been able, by the force of his own personality, his own excitement, his own aura of drama, to lift the game from its sports realm to a social event. Madison Avenue types and truck drivers were bound to the set. Young girls, in their fashionable boyfriends' apartments, were united with matronly Scarsdale types in this historic event. Kids delayed their homework this Sunday for the game. It could have well been called the Joe Namath bowl. A lot of people tuned in to see him get killed. A lot of others were watching to see him trim the Colts. Some didn't care. They just liked football. Others didn't even care about football. They wanted simply to see what the excitement was all about.

More than sixty million people sat in front of their television sets that Sunday afternoon from shortly before 2 p.m. to well after 4 p.m.

The real lucky ones were in Miami, Florida, in the beautifully bedecked Orange Bowl Stadium. There were 75,377 people at the football game. There is no doubt that ten times that number will tell the story some day about watching Joe Namath in the Super Bowl game. They were the same ones who saw Tunney beat Dempsey,

Bobby Thomson beat the Dodgers for the 1951 pennant and Red Grange beat Michigan.

"They were the same ones," said Sonny Werblin, who was at the Super Bowl game as an interested fan, "who told me this year they could have bought the New York American Football League franchise from Harry Wismer."

Weeb Ewbank tried to treat the Super Bowl game like any other football game. He could fool anybody. But he couldn't fool his stomach. It danced and turned and rolled over a half dozen times as he mishandled his breakfast.

"I was calm," said Weeb, "but my stomach wasn't."

The team ate breakfast together. They had their choice of steak or eggs. Some had steak and eggs. Few had neither. It just didn't seem like a day for eating.

Namath was the same as always. He laughed. He enjoyed a steak. He poked a couple of his teammates in the ribs. His eyes looked the same as they usually did before a game. Sleepy. The world was turned on for the biggest game of Joe Namath's life. He hardly seemed to care.

The Jets dressed slowly in the locker room under the stands of the Orange Bowl. Namath had played in the Orange Bowl game with Alabama four years earlier, so he knew the layout of the stadium. He knew which way the wind blew, which side of the field was softer, which way the sun would be in his eyes. Joe Namath worked hard at being a football player. It was no accident that the Jets were preparing for a championship game.

Now the team was dressed and ready. There was a small moment of silence when each man was allowed to express his own thoughts to God, or whomever he wanted to at that instant, before the game.

"We don't pray to win," said Weeb Ewbank, "we play to win."

Ewbank said he never prayed for a victory. He just prayed that everybody would do his best and come out of the game healthy.

"I guess it never hurts if a ballplayer slips in a request for just that extra step on a long pass," he said.

There was a steady, loud, buzzing noise running around, through and over the huge Miami stadium. The

excitement had swept the ticket-holders into tense anticipation. They were too nervous to drink their beers or munch their hot dogs. This wasn't the game to get a bag on or get stiff at. This was a game to watch.

Kyle Rote, a former football great with the New York Giants, stood on the sidelines watching the television camera. He would wait the signal and then the players would appear for their introductions. Now the red light flashed and the Jets were rushing at him, sweeping to a white, chalked line, turning sharply, racing past him, exciting the crowd to massive outpourings of sound. They came at him, the guards and the tackles and the ends, the pass receivers and the defensive backs, the running backs and the kickers. And now . . .

"At quarterback," said Rote—the sound shook the stadium, cheers and boos, whistles, yells and banging seats . . . he came out from under the goal posts, limping slightly, bouncing, bending, half jaunty, half controlled. The white shoes. The two-inch tape on his wrist. The white uniform trimmed in green. The number 12 on his arm, the huge number 12 on his back with NAMATH printed in green. The plastic football helmet and the bird cage in front of his face, the small football imprinted on its side with the word JETS across the middle—"for the Jets, Joe Namath." Rote stretched it out, pronounced it *name-ath*, as the crowd swallowed up the sound in his enthusiastic burst.

Namath jogged to the sidelines and stood against the chalk mark. He kept his helmet on as the Jets defensive team went into the game. He knew he would soon be in action. He had picked the Jets to win because he knew he was good. He also knew the Jets defense was good. They would hold the Colts. There was no doubt about that in his mind.

Jim Turner approached the football. He held his hand high. He looked at his teammates. They were ready to challenge the invincible Baltimore Colts. All the talk was finished. This is what it was all about. Turner moved forward, drove his right foot into the ball and sent the Jets charging downfield like some wild Indians in a John Wayne movie. They needed only to yell, only to wave

their tomahawks, only to put on their war paint to change the scene from the Colts' last stand to Custer's.

To the shock of some in the huge crowd, the Jets still were in a scoreless game after the kickoff. Bodies had been propelled backwards, but most of them were Baltimore bodies. Three plays and the Colts were finished for the first round. They had tried the Jets defense and found little to their liking.

"I felt right there," said linebacker Larry Grantham, "that the films had been accurate. You can't really tell until you feel the body force. They hit us coming out, but no harder than any other team. I felt, actually, that maybe we weren't even playing the best team in the NFL. Maybe Minnesota was really a better team."

After one series of downs, the Jets had the football. The offense jogged onto the field. Namath had called the first play on the sidelines. Now he moved them into the huddle for the go signal.

"On two," he said, and snapped his hands. The lineman bent down low. Matt Snell, the fullback, and Emerson Boozer, the halfback, set for the charge. Don Maynard, the flanker back, and George Sauer, the split end, looked at Namath for a possible adjustment to the play. There was none.

"Hut one, hut two . . ."

The ball came slapping off center John Schmitt's hands into Namath's large fingers. He turned and handed it straight out to fullback Snell, who drove hard through the right side of the vaunted Baltimore line for five yards. The Jets had moved on Baltimore. They had started to establish their ground game. If they could do that, they could pass. If they could pass, they could win. Joe Namath patted Snell on the back as he came back into the huddle. The Jets had to kick and Baltimore took over and kicked back when they failed to move.

Snell drove into the Baltimore line again. Now Namath was ready. The Jets had sensed he was setting up the Colts. Now the moment was at hand. Namath called a long pass play to Don Maynard on the right side. That was Bobby Boyd's side. He had better be ready. Joe Na-

math was about to let one of the bombs fall free out of the bomb bay door.

"On one," said Namath.

He wanted a quick snap, a quick setup, just the quick, protective blocking so he could shake Maynard from the crowd.

"In college," Weeb had said, "they have a second or a second and a half to throw. In the pros, the good quarterbacks can take four seconds before they throw."

Schmitt slapped the ball to Namath. He ran back, set, looked downfield. The crowd stood up. This is what they came to see. This was Joe Namath in action, loosening his arm, showing his wrist, showing what the \$400,000 was all about, showing what had filled Shea Stadium, what had taken the Jets to Florida, what had made a brilliant man out of Weeb Ewbank and a successful dreamer out of Sonny Werblin. Downfield went Maynard racing on his skinny legs, his backside looking like it wasn't with him, his high-stepping legs churning, his arms at his side, his loping style deceiving, his skinny body hardly real for a football player.

Maynard twisted his head to the left and moved sharply to the right. The crowd gasped as the ball came sailing high along the right side line. Maynard had his man beaten, just a fraction off him, but beaten. Then he stumbled for a split second, regained his stride and reached out. The football floated down, its trajectory a perfect pitch, its nose heading for the ground. Maynard's hands reached out, stretched, aching for the feel of the football. By a stumbled step, by a fraction, by the length of his right hand, Maynard had missed Namath's perfect 50-yard pass on the sideline. Namath had adjusted for everything. His throw took into consideration the wind, Maynard's speed, Maynard's fake, the ground, the flight of the ball, everything that could be considered a variable. He forgot about a possible stumble. The ball bounced hard against the ground and Maynard kept running into the end zone without it.

The crowd was buzzing, talking, cheering, yelling. Namath had shown off his arm. It was not a mirage. The Baltimore defending backs had seen him throw. He had

thrown long on them. He had really passed long on them. He had almost completed a bomb on the Colts in his very first throw.

"That pass," said Clive Rush, the brilliant backfield coach of the Jets, "set them to thinking. That one opened the game up for us. That's the one they had to be looking for all game."

Namath waited as Maynard loped back to the huddle. It took some while since he had been so far downfield. His slow, rolling gait served an important purpose. He had shown the Colts and the crowd that Namath could throw a football from one end of the Orange Bowl to another. The Colts would have to be ready to defend against it.

Namath continued to probe the middle of the Baltimore line like a good fighter looking for the opening for his right hand. The Colts, with Morrall playing his usual conservative game, stayed with the three yards and a cloud of dust game. Punch the middle. Punch the tackles. Flip a short pass to the sidelines. The quarter was being used up when the Jets stopped the Colts on New York's twelve yard line.

Now Namath went into action again. The probing was over and it was time to start opening up the ball game. The Colts had to look for the bomb since Namath loved to blast out of trouble with a long throw.

"That was one of the things he had to learn," said Weeb. "He had such confidence in his arm he thought he could always throw long to get out of trouble. Some times a few runs and a short pass might prove just as valuable in gaining ground."

Namath knew the Colts had scouted him well. He knew they were watching downfield for a long toss. So he threw short. He took the snap, rifled a quick pass to George Sauer on the sidelines, and gasped when Sauer let the ball squeeze out of his hands after being tackled. Sauer had turned to catch the football and when he did, defensive back Lenny Lyles cut him down. The ball squirted loose and Ron Porter, a linebacker, swallowed it up on the twelve yard line of the Jets.

Now the smart-aleck money was in good shape. The Jets had been able to hold the Colts almost for the whole

first quarter. That was more than they could have expected. From here on, it would be a romp. Or so said the smart money.

Smart money laughed when Morrall drove the Colts to the six of the Jets. It was just a matter of time now.

Morrall faded back from the six. This would be it. The first score. He picked out rookie end Tom Mitchell, free on the left side. Mitchell, acting like a rookie, forgot to catch the football. The ball bounced high into the air, hung suspended for a moment, and dropped down into the hands of Randy Beverly, the Jets cornerback, three yards deep into the end zone. It was a touchback for the Jets and they would start moving from their own 20 yard line.

"That's when I knew we had them," said Jets defensive back Johnny Sample, who had played for Baltimore in the NFL. "If they couldn't hit a short one like that they couldn't hit anything. I knew we'd win right then."

Namath took a look at the Colts defense and went right to work. The one thing no NFL team was able to do all year was run right at Baltimore's right side. It was defended by Ordell Braase, a 245-pound all-league end, and Don Shinnick, an agile 220-pound all-league linebacker. One must remember that the all-league they made their reputation in was the National Football League.

Matt Snell, a bruising 220-pounder, who chose this afternoon to play the best football game of his life, drove headlong into the Baltimore line. Crash. Smack. Wham. Bang. The Jets had twenty-six yards on four straight carries as the first quarter ended with a scoreless tie. The Jets were driving. The Colts were giving ground. The bookies were throwing up.

Namath passed over the middle to his pal, Bill Mathis, for a short gain. Now it was third down and four yards to go for a first down for Namath and the Jets.

"This is how you separate the good ones from the great ones," said Ewbank. "Third down and four is the name of the game."

Johnny Unitas, Bart Starr, Norm Van Brocklin, Bobby Layne, and a few others had made their reputations and their livings by hitting passes on third down and four.

Namath moved from the huddle, looked at the Baltimore defense and sent George Sauer wide to his right.

Sauer, an intelligent young man with a fascinating hobby of word-collecting, was too much for the Colts to handle. He broke to his right, stopped and hooked in. Namath slapped the football into his hands for a fourteen-yard gain.

"Sauer is as fine an end as you will ever see in football," said Vince Lombardi, who was watching a Super Bowl as a spectator for the first time in three Super Bowls.

Namath knew he had a hot thing going so he didn't let up. He came right back to Sauer and drilled a pass to him at the Baltimore 23 yard line. Now the crowd was getting a glimpse of Namath in action, cool, calm, unconcerned about the highly rated Baltimore defense. He wasn't too worried about them. They might soon start worrying about him. The psychological edge, the momentum, the balance that switches the flow of a football game from one team to another, had started to ebb towards the Jets. The crowd sensed it, rising from their seats, screaming, shouting, bellowing as Namath picked the Colts apart like a good gunner in a World War I biplane.

"He was calling a magnificent game," said Ewbank. "A quarterback has the feel of his team and the feel of the other team. He has to know what plays would work at what spots and why. Joe seemed to know instinctively."

Backfield Coach Clive Rush, who had worked so long and so hard with Namath over four years, was watching the show like an old professor watching his prized pupil deliver his valedictory address.

"Joe was almost perfect," said Clive. "It was a textbook performance. I don't think he made two wrong calls all day."

Now Namath had the Jets believing they were on the move. They were chopping up the ground and moving the Colts back, back, back toward their own goal line. Namath handed off to Emerson Boozer for a two-yard gain. He passed to Snell, showing another aspect of his great skill, for twelve yards. The burly fullback drove the foot-

ball to the nine yard line. Now it was a run by Snell again. The former Ohio State star, the first big name bonus player signed by Sonny Werblin, dragged two tacklers to the four yard line. The crowd was on its feet as Namath, like some jungle lion, moved in for the kill. He looked his his right; he looked to his left; he bent down, took the ball from Schmitt, handed off to Snell, finished his fake and watched the fullback slash through a king-sized hole in the Baltimore right side.

The referee charged to the ball, waited an instant, then threw his hands high over his head in the classic autumn sign. Jim Turner kicked the point with veteran Babe Parilli holding, and the Jets led the unbeatable, invincible, wondrous Baltimore Colts, 7-0, in the 1969 Super Bowl.

Namath went to the phones as soon as he came to the sidelines. He talked to Clive Rush, upstairs in the press box, and dug out some more information on the Colts. He was working, thinking, analyzing the score. Would they adjust now or could he repeat the style? What has been their pattern when scored on early?

"With all the ballyhoo," Rush was to say later, "people forgot how hard Joe had worked in improving himself. He always had the physical tools to be an exceptional quarterback. All he needed was experience. You can only get that one way, on the field, making mistakes, taking your lumps, learning all the time.

"People had him all pro before he played a game. They had to give him a chance to develop. No pro quarterback is too efficient before his fourth or fifth year. It is just too complicated a job. There is more to it than just physical skills. It is hours of mental work, reading coverages, recognizing defenses, developing coordination with your receivers.

"Joe has a gifted release. His wrists, his forearm, his arms, are so strong and quick. He can get the ball away fast and hard when he is being pressed. He can take you downfield in a moment.

"He did all this on those knees, those very bad knees. The guy had a lot of courage. Nobody ever really knew how much pain he had. He just wouldn't talk about it. His pain limited our offense. There were certain things

we couldn't do because we couldn't afford to take a chance on Joe being hit. His knees took the rollout away from us. He couldn't run. He could only drop back and pass."

Only drop back and pass. And William Shakespeare could only write,

Namath stood on the sidelines and the Jets defense went to work. They had to work fast. Baltimore seemed to be jolted awake by the New York touchdown. Earl Morrall made a fine call and sent Tom Matte, Baltimore's rugged runner, through the middle of the New York line. Matte charged to his right, got free at the 35 and raced downfield. Johnny Sample caught him against the white line on the New York 16. He had gone 58 yards. If the Jets were going to call it a day and a good show, they could fold up right here. They didn't.

Morrall, who called a strange game, made another mistake. He tried to fake the Jets with a pass instead of the expected run. He sent his flanker back, Willie Richardson, to the goal line and then fell short with the ball.

"I got my arm up to throw and somebody touched it as I was coming down. It was just enough," the Baltimore quarterback said.

The ball floated instead of roared to Richardson. Sample, crusading to avenge his bad experience with the NFL after he had been cut by several teams, charged in front of Richardson, plucked the ball from the air and cradled it to his chest as he hit the ground. Then he leaped up, held his fist high in the air and danced off the field. Johnny Sample came not only to win, but to humiliate.

Namath moved the Jets back upfield and they kicked to Baltimore. With time in the first half running out, Morrall got the ball back. He had a first down on the New York 45. He called a tricky play. The Colts had practiced this and were saving it for the right spot. This was the right spot. The Jets were content to take a 7-0 lead into the locker room for the first half. They guarded the pass receivers easily.

Now Morrall had the ball. He handed it to Tom Matte, who ran to his right. Jerry Hill ran downfield toward the right. Jimmy Orr drifted to the left side of the Jets goal

line. Matte now threw the ball back across the field to Morrall. Orr stood alone downfield waving his arms, screaming for the football, begging that Morrall throw it to him for a cinch touchdown. Morrall never saw him.

"I was facing toward Hill," he said. "He was the only one I saw so I threw it to him."

While the crowd gasped—they had seen Orr all alone—Morrall threw the football downfield toward Hill. Jim Hudson, one of Namath's running mates, showed he wasn't bothered by some extracurricular activities with Joe and made a leaping interception of the football.

Now the Jets had pulled two of Morrall's passes out of the air, and Joe Namath, who used to lead the world in passes intercepted, had managed to complete his passes only with fellows wearing the green and white of the Jets or not at all.

"The best pass," said Namath, "sometimes is the overthrown pass. It isn't intercepted, you only lose the down and you still have a chance to complete it on the next play."

There were just a few seconds left on the clock as Namath handed off to Snell. The gun sounded for the first half and the Jets ran into their locker room leading Baltimore, 7-0. In thirty more minutes they might be the champions of the football world.

"Way to go, defense," said Larry Grantham. "Let's keep charging, keep driving."

Sample, Grantham, and the coaches went to each and every defensive player to remind him to keep his head, keep working hard and keep thinking of that pot of gold at the end of the afternoon.

"We gotta win," said Sample, "my wife has already bought a new fur coat with the money."

Namath sat on the floor of the locker room under the stands at the Orange Bowl. He chewed on an orange and washed it down with a soft drink. He wiped the sweat from his face and washed his hands. He quietly discussed several technical moves with Weeb Ewbank and Clive Rush.

The world swirled above him as Namath rested. The Jets were only leading 7-0 but the momentum of the

game, the feel of domination, the feel of command belonged to the Jets. The fans sensed that it would be the Jets, not the Colts, who were more likely to put points on the scoreboard in the second half. The fans were left with the lingering memory of the first half ending with the Colts disorganized, with a high school play failing to work, with their quarterback failing to see an open man, with Morrall walking off the field with his head down. He looked like a beaten man.

Things didn't change in the opening minute of the second half. Morrall took the snap from center, handed off to Matte, and shook his head as he fumbled. A half dozen Jets landed on parts of the football. The Jets had the ball again.

Namath went to work like a surgeon picking out some ailing parts. He sliced a piece here, a piece there. He passed short and sent Snell through the line. He worked the ball to Boozer and slipped a pass to Mathis. He sent Snell back through the middle and dropped a short screen off to Mathis.

Now the ball was on the Baltimore 32. Ewbank sent Jim Turner in for a field goal try. He wanted a ten-point sure lead instead of a gamble for a first down. He knew what his players could do. He knew that Turner, a high-strung, sensitive young man, had to get a field goal now if he was to be of use later. He had to get on the scoreboard.

Babe Parilli, who never was Joe Namath, even when he was a young quarterback with Green Bay, came in with Turner. Schmitt snapped the ball back, Parilli put it down and Turner promptly smashed it through the goal posts for three more points. The Jets led 10-0.

Halfway through the third period, with Morrall still having trouble, Johnny Unitas stood up along the sidelines, took off his jacket, put on his helmet and began loosening up.

"John had thrown well in practice before the game," said Coach Don Shula. "I thought he might be able to help us."

Unitas, sore-armed and seldom-used all fall, was about to be asked to perform another miracle. He had done it

several thousand times. This day he would not do it. This day was different. This day was not owned by Johnny Unitas. There was only one quarterback who dominated this day. His name was not Earl Morrall.

The Jets got to the 32 yard line again. Turner came back in late in the third quarter, split the uprights with his second field goal and the Jets led, 13-0.

Four minutes remained in the third quarter. The Colts came on the field for another offensive try. This time Morrall stayed behind and Johnny Unitas took over the quarterbacking. The crowd responded to the presence of the great Baltimore play caller. There was still plenty of time. More than nineteen minutes remained for Unitas to work his magic.

"He was still Johnny Unitas, sore arm or not," said Larry Grantham. "We had to respect him."

Unitas started out cold. He missed two passes, a run was stopped dead and the Colts had to kick. The Jets, with Namath using every precious second, drove toward the Baltimore goal. Three yards. Six yards. Four yards. One yard. Seven yards. Now, for the third time, Turner was standing ready. Parilli put the football on the ground and Turner kicked it through again. The Jets led 16-0. The clock showed some eight minutes to go.

Unitas was back in. Now the Jets knew that time was the key factor. They could give Unitas the short passes, keep the long one away, waste time getting up, hold their man on the ground a little extra and listen for the sweet sounds of the tick, tick, tock of the clock.

The show wasn't yet over. Unitas was alive, if not completely well. He moved his team across midfield. He was faced with the tough third-down play. He failed. Now it was fourth down. The Colts were too far behind with too little time left for Unitas to give up the football. He called for a pass to Jimmy Orr. The Jets charged him, he bounced loose, stood up straight and hit Orr at the goal line. He was wrestled out of bounds just before he could sneak in.

Unitas called for a short drive to the right and Jerry Hill bulled his way into the end zone. It was Baltimore's first score. Three minutes remained in the game. The

Jets led 16-7 as Lou Michaels, one of Namath's barroom friends, kicked the extra point. Unitas still had a chance. The Jets had to tighten their defense.

"A man's reputation has something to do with his success," said Larry Grantham. "When Unitas came in we didn't play as well as we had against Morrall."

Both teams were tiring. It was a hot afternoon after two months of playing in cold weather. The pressure of the game and the ferocious hitting by both sides was wearing out the players. The Colts would exploit it on the next play.

Baltimore kicked off. Everybody expected an on-side kick. Baltimore had to have the ball if they were to have a chance. The kickoff bounced crazily along the Jets front line. It seemed as if several dozen players, many coming out of the stands, were rushing to the football. Baltimore recovered. They were still trying.

Could Unitas do it again? Was he about to pull off the last miracle of his time?

Unitas passed to Willie Richardson. Sample batted it away. Unitas tried to pass and was tackled. Unitas looked for Jimmy Orr, was hit by Gerry Philbin, and let the ball wobble short. Fourth down. Two minutes to play. The very last chance.

"If Unitas got a touchdown here," said Grantham, "we knew they could come back and kick a field goal in the final minutes. The whole game would turn. They could get the momentum. This is where we had to make our stand."

The thirty-five-year-old quarterback took the football, raced back, looked for Orr, saw him in a crowd, threw the ball, and waited. He wasn't sure about this one. The ball was thrown on a low line. Larry Grantham, smelling out Orr's move, leaped into the air, touched the ball with his fingers and slapped it toward the sidelines. It was over. It was New York ball. Grantham got off the ground, took two steps toward the sideline, held his football helmet in the air and finally flung it twenty feet over his head.

"We had stopped them," he said. "We had beaten them. We had survived the great Johnny Unitas. Every-

body talked about Joe that day but the defense did one hell of a job."

And the gun crashed the Miami air some ninety seconds later. The Jets had beaten the Baltimore Colts, 16-7, for the Super Bowl championship in football's most memorable upset.

The Jets crashed through the locker room doors as they crashed through the Colts. They patted each other on the backs, hugged and kissed and fizzed soda bottles all over everybody.

"Where's the champagne?" yelled Namath. Commissioner Pete Rozelle, who was to tangle with Namath later, had ordered that champagne would not be allowed in the dressing rooms. Namath knew it. As the television cameras grinded away at the happy scene, Namath continued to shout, "We want champagne."

The champagne would flow, often, and privately. This public party was to serve the Jets well.

Kyle Rote, who thought he was being assigned to the dressing room of the losers in the pre-game planning while his former teammate Pat Summerall had the winners, climbed on a wooden table and began bringing Jets players to the American television watching public.

Matt Snell and Jerry Philbin and George Sauer and guard Bob Talamini and all the other Jets who had provided so much this day got their time on the tube.

Now it was Namath's turn. He walked calmly to the wooden platform. He was helped up by his teammates. He held a soft drink in his hand. His black hair glistened in the lights. His dark eyes, made darker by the black substance under his eyes to make him look fierce and only incidentally to prevent glare, were wide open.

"Hello, Kyle," he said, "welcome to the American Football League."

Rote laughed and moved on to his first question. "Congratulations, Joe, for a fine effort. Tell me, Joe, you said all week that the Jets would win. Did you believe it, really believe it?"

"I always had confidence we would win. But I didn't know what to expect. But I had a good time. When you go out and play football you're supposed to have a good

time. When you're losing you don't have a good time. So we went out and won."

His teammates stood alongside the wooden platform, with the television cameras and the hot lights and the sweating director and waited for Joe to open his bomb bay doors again.

"Kyle, I just want to add that all the writers that said we didn't belong on the same field with the Colts, that they would kill us, that we would lose big . . . I hope they all eat their pencils and pads. We won."

Joe Namath was being Joe Namath again. He had enjoyed his running feud with the writers all week. He knew that the only thing that mattered would be how this game came out. If he couldn't deliver, if he couldn't put his passes where his mouth was, he would be skinned alive in Monday's newspapers. Now he had beaten the Colts and shocked the writers. It was no time for magnanimous treatment of them. Would they have treated him any differently if he had been on the wrong side of the score?

Rote thanked Namath for his interview and looked embarrassed. It just wasn't the way Kyle Rote or any of the football Giants took their victories. Joe Namath was a different breed. Namath stepped down from the platform. His father had worked his way into the locker room and they embraced as the cameraman recorded the historic scene. Almost every player on the Jets, now all thousands richer, came up to shake Namath's hand. They had all done their share, but they knew Namath had done more than his share. He had won the game, really, on a sun-filled afternoon as he sat by the pool at the Galt Ocean Mile Hotel, sipped a Scotch on the rocks and told the football writers, "We'll win. We'll beat the Colts."

He had lived up to his promise. He had brought drama and excitement to the game all by himself. Joe Willie Namath had stood up to the world, told the world where to get off and made everybody like it. Joe Willie Namath was just different. Oh God, was he different!

BACHELOR I

The afterglow of the Super Bowl lasted well into February. Joe Namath had exceeded all of his own dreams, all of Sonny Werblin's, all of his family's. Without doubt, he simply was the most exciting figure in American life. No politician, no actor, certainly no sports celebrity, could touch Namath. He was the king; he was Clark Gable and Gary Cooper and Mickey Mantle and Superman all wrapped in one. He was Joe Namath. He was too much.

Every night was another adventure, another girl, another party, another famous businessman or sports personality or television producer trying to shake his hand.

"They were all the same," said Namath. "Everybody said they had picked us in the Super Bowl. Hell, if everybody had picked us in the Super Bowl, how come we were seventeen-point underdogs?"

Late in January the parties stopped and Namath had a chance to get some rest. He picked a lousy place for it. He went to Vietnam.

Namath went to Vietnam on a State Department tour with Steve Wright of the Giants, Mary Fleming of the Packers, Jim Otto of Oakland and broadcaster Charlie Jones of NBC. They toured hospitals, talked to the wounded servicemen, signed autographs and tried to make the boys a little more comfortable.

In one remote Vietnam hospital one kid yelled at Namath from his bed. "Hey, Joe, you let me down."

"How's that?"

"You cut off your mustache. We expected that you would play with it in the Super Bowl. We were disappointed when you cut off your Fu Manchu."

These were Namath's people. They were young. They were independent. They were brave. They were mature beyond their years. Some people might have trouble understanding Joe Namath. These kids never did.

"I remember one kid," said Namath. "Before we went

in to see him the doctor told us he had seventy-two hours to live, that he had lost both his arms and the rest of his body was all shot up. What do you say to a guy like that?"

Namath said something. He didn't remember what but he made the kid smile. There was something about Joe Namath, about his style, about his manner, about his bearing, about his face and his voice and his hunched shoulders, that made people smile. In his way, Namath made the world a hell of a lot more fun. Of course, it seemed, Namath was having most of it.

While he was in Vietnam Namath was named the winner of the famed Hickok Belt. This is an award that is presented annually to the professional athlete who is considered the best in all sports for the year. Namath defeated baseball player Denny McClain of the Detroit Tigers, who had won thirty-one games, the first pitcher in more than thirty years to win more than thirty games. Namath, according to the voters who presented him with the \$10,000 diamond-studded, gold-buckled belt, had really been the best pitcher of the year.

Namath came back to the States a week later and the movie people started to move in on him. They wanted him to star in a dozen pictures. He could start his acting career anyplace he wanted: Universal, Twentieth Century, Warner's, Paramount. And he would start where he belonged---on top.

Sonny Werblin, who knew the scene, was handling the show. "Joe would like to make a movie," said Werblin, "but we don't want it to be a freak movie. And we don't want it to be a football movie. Joe has sex appeal." And the eyes from the gals had it.

"He's like Sinatra," said Werblin. "Some people think Joe couldn't be an actor, but years ago Sinatra was just a skinny kid on a bandstand. Now he's a top actor. If it could happen to him, it could happen to Joe, because he's got the same kind of sex appeal. Look at Cary Grant. He was an acrobat. And Rock Hudson. He was a truck driver. But they had sex appeal. That's what counts."

While Werblin and Joe's Alabama lawyers, Mike Bite and Jimmy Walsh, examined the offers, Namath flew to

Rancho La Costa, California, to play in the American Airlines golf tournament.

There were hundreds of famous athletes in the tournament which pairs football and baseball players. In a match created in heaven, made in Rancho La Costa, Joe Namath was paired with Mickey Mantle. They immediately found they enjoyed each other's company. Both were the most famous athletes in their business. Both were good-timers who enjoyed all the good things in life. Both had a strange hedonistic attitude about life. Each had said publicly that they thought they would live shorter lives than they could expect. Neither slowed down to watch their lives grow.

Namath and Mantle finished third in the tournament but Namath showed how far he had really come from Beaver Falls. He lost his money clip with a thousand dollars cash in it and decided it was the funniest thing to happen to him in weeks.

"It must have been somewhere in the woods when I hooked my drive," Namath said. "Maybe some squirrel got it up some tree."

Namath had a way of getting things stolen or misplaced after the Super Bowl. He lost his money clip at the golf course. His apartment was burglarized and his mink coat and a bracelet were taken. Later singer Kay Stevens said she was robbed of \$45,000 in jewelry while staying in a New York hotel. One of the things the burglars took was an identification bracelet engraved "Broadway Joe" for a birthday present. The bad guys also took a photograph showing Joe and Miss Stevens together. She was wearing a black sable coat. He wasn't.

"I had won that coat betting on Joe in the Super Bowl," she said. "The picture was taken in San Francisco and that was when Joe had told me his bracelet had been stolen from him out of his apartment."

There was no doubt, Joe would find some way for Miss Stevens to make up the loss to him.

Namath commuted between Florida and New York for an occasional west coast golf date or an east coast television spot. He appeared on the Mike Douglas show with a newly grown Fu Manchu, defended long hair and beards

and made the audience titter when he said he didn't go out with as many girls as the newspapers said he did. Douglas suggested that the newspapers may have been underestimating Joe.

In April he was back in Florida. He stayed at the exclusive Palm Bay Club, enjoyed blonde female company, lolled in the sun, signed papers on some of his business deals and enjoyed the leisure of his life. One early morning he was back in the headlines.

Namath, Mike Bite, Lenny Perna, a night club entertainer, and a girl who later said she was Bite's date and not Namath's, dined until shortly after 2 a.m. They had a few drinks at the club and took off for some of the late-night spots around Miami. They had a few more drinks. Then they took off about 3:30 in the morning down the 79th Street Causeway. Namath was driving a rented white Cadillac convertible.

Shortly after 4 a.m. a Dade County police car driven by Patrolman Raymond De Santis spotted Namath's car speeding along the Causeway. He gave chase and ordered Namath over to the side of the road.

"Let's see your license," said the policeman.

"You know who I am," said Namath. "You know me."

"Let's see your license."

Namath said he wasn't carrying his license with him. He said it was back at the Palm Bay Club. He said he could go there right then and get it and convince the officer that he was Joe Willie Namath of Beaver Falls, Pa., New York City, Miami, Las Vegas, Hollywood, and all points.

"You're drunk," said the officer.

Now Namath blew his cool. He shouted at the officer and called him a few well-chosen words, none of which the officer hadn't heard before. Namath can call some great plays in a football huddle. He calls lousy cuss words. The same as anybody.

"What got me mad," said Namath, "was that he was saying that I was drunk. How could I be drunk? I only had maybe four drinks all night. I probably hadn't had one for two hours by the time he stopped me."

Patrolman De Santis wrote out a summons charging

Namath with drunken driving, driving without a license and careless driving. He ordered him to the Dade County Jail. Namath arrived at the jail and immediately volunteered to take a Breathalyzer test. The drama unfolded as Namath blew into the machine. With all hands studying the device, Namath registered an alcoholic content of .02 per cent alcohol in that beautiful hairy-chested body of his. Namath had passed the test with flying colors. According to Florida law, everyone is presumed sober until proven drunk. The machine says a person is drunk only if he has more than .10 per cent alcohol in his body.

It was like his industrial arts courses at Alabama. Namath passed without any sweat.

The police immediately dropped the drunken driving charge but continued the careless-driving and driving-without-a-license charges. Namath was released in the custody of Mike Bite about 7 o'clock in the morning, just about time for bed. A couple of hours later the phones began ringing. Joe Namath's drinking was big news again.

"Arrested, who says I've been arrested?" asked Namath sleepily when a reporter called to check the details "I wasn't arrested. I was just stopped."

The next afternoon Namath agreed to a press conference. With reporters ready for all the details, Namath said, "I did cuss out the officer and I'm sorry about that. But he got me mad. He said I was drunk. I wasn't drunk, absolutely not. I was sober."

Protesting that he was sober as a judge, Namath said he would fight the traffic charges when they came up in court.

For the second time in his Jets career Namath was in court cases. The first time was with *Time Magazine* Editor Charles Parmiter and the second time was with a Dade County Police officer. People who knew *Time* and Dade County found it hard not to be sympathetic with Namath.

Reporter Paul Zimmerman of the *New York Post*, who covered Namath from rookie to Super Bowl, said, "At least he knows how to pick his enemies."

Two weeks later Namath was back in New York. It was easy for New York to tell. Namath was tying up traffic on Lexington Avenue again. Namath stepped out

of a cab in front of Bachelors III (where he would later return for another scene) to receive the Hickok Belt award he had earned while he was in Vietnam. He wore an Edwardian Jacket, an orange shirt, a gold tie, alligator shoes and no socks. It was a mild day.

"There he is, there he is," shouted a girl. "Oh my God, he's beautiful."

Oh my God, *she* was beautiful. But nobody even looked at her. Namath had taken over the street. The radio and television people, the Hickok people, the Bachelors III people, the people people jammed the street as Namath accepted the award. Namath said all the right things, was gosh-awful humble about being in a class with Jimmy Brown and Otto Graham and promised he would be in training camp on time with his knees intact. He wanted to beat the New York Giants in a scheduled August exhibition, 30-0.

"If we don't do that," he said, "we'll be considered second best."

Namath was first best. He had proved that in January when he shocked the world with his mouth and his arm. He wasn't about to stop now.

"How would the Giants do in the AFL?" he was asked by a thick-skinned NFL type. Some guys never learn.

"If the Giants were in the AFL," drawled Joe, "they'd get killed."

The guffaws ran through the press like water down a country stream. Joe Namath had spoken. Was he trying to build ticket sales for the August game or did he mean it? Didn't Joe Namath always mean what he said?

Namath, Bachelor I, invited the press into Bachelors III for a final drink and departed for Florida with his Hickok Belt. He had to tie up some loose ends on his Broadway Joe's restaurant deal and then prepare himself for his salute at Beaver Falls. He had to shave.

Namath was to be honored in his home town for service above and beyond the call of duty. He had singlehandedly taken Beaver Falls out of the shadow of Pittsburgh and put Pittsburgh in the shadow of Beaver Falls.

Several days before the dinner, some people proposed a novel way of expressing their sentiments to Namath.

They proposed to have the Navy build a ship and name it after Beaver Falls. Joe Namath could christen it with champagne.

Robert G. Daly, manager of operations at General Dynamic's Quincy shipbuilding yard, said the Navy could break with tradition and have Namath swing the champagne bottle against the ship's bow.

"From what I have read," said Daly, "Namath is a pretty good swinger."

The idea had little chance for success. Joe Namath would not pass up an opportunity to see a girl swing against a ship. And Joe Namath would never be so foolish as to allow good champagne to drip wastefully down the side of a ship.

Beaver Falls might have to wait for its ship, but it wouldn't have to wait for Joe Namath. On May 24, 1969, Namath returned to Beaver Falls as the conquering hero. He was given a hero's welcome, worthy of MacArthur, worthy of Eisenhower, worthy of any of them, as his white Cadillac convertible rolled past the Beaver River in Beaver Valley to Beaver Falls. More than 25,000 people lined the streets as the motorcade made its way downtown.

The kids and the grownups and the girls, especially the girls, waved to Joe as he rode through his old haunts, down Seventh Street, down past the Blue Room. Every town has a Blue Room, a combination beer hall, pool room and restaurant where the kids spend their summer days and nights.

Chuck Gorell, the chief of police, remembered Joe well from the Blue Room. "A couple of my men found Joe on the roof of the Sahli Chevrolet dealer one night. They drew their guns, looking for some burglar. 'Don't shoot, it's Joe Namath,' this one teenager yells. They were up there because they wanted to paint the orange and black colors on the balloon up there."

Namath's car, with a friend driving and two girlfriends in the back seat watching, rolled slowly through the town, past the screaming kids, past the old friends and the classmates. Banners and emblems were everywhere. "Thanks for putting us on the map." And another. "Beaver Falls Boosters salute the super quarterback."

One simply read "Broadway."

The car rushed through the end of town and into the residential area. It had taken forty minutes to make the mile. The motorcade made its way to Geneva College, where 1500 people waited to honor Namath. He got out of his car, signed autographs, kidded with the small children, shook hands with old friends and walked through the doors of the school.

Namath moved to the dais and sat down. A waiter came over. "Clear water," said Namath. He usually mixed Johnny Walker Red Label Scotch with it. This time he was in front of family and friends. "These people are beautiful, just beautiful," he said.

Now it was Joe's time to speak. He stood up, hunched over a little and looked out at the crowd. They were silent. They waited for his words. "I want to thank my parents, my brothers, my coaches and all my teammates," he said. "They all helped form my skill. Without them I couldn't have accomplished anything."

Now he got to the heart of his talk. "Eventually I hope to come back here some day and settle down. I don't like the things there are to do here because there aren't any . . ." And he paused and waited for his laugh. "But when I do finally get married, and I hope it's sometime in the near future, I want to get married and have a family and live here."

His mother, Mrs. Rose Szolnoki, dabbed at her eyes. A lot of the older folks in town looked a little embarrassed. Joe Namath, the swinger, was really just one of them. They had heard it from his own lips. At that moment, at that instant in his life, Joe Namath meant what he said.

In the clear light of a new day, after a new date and a new scene at Bachelors III, he would realize he had fibbed a little, but who did he hurt?

"I believe," Namath had always said, "you should be able to do what you want as long as you don't hurt yourself or anybody else."

He hadn't hurt himself or anybody else that day. And he had made an awful lot of small-town people very happy. In a way, again, Joe Namath was doing his thing.

He was making himself and an awful lot of people happy. And nobody was really hurt.

The dinner ended and Namath spent some time at his father's house playing a mechanical bowling game with his brothers in the cellar rumpus room of the house. Then, after a few hours sleep, he journeyed to his mother's house for breakfast. He had made everybody happy again. He got back into the white Cadillac and drove to the Pittsburgh Airport.

"It's a pretty place, Beaver Falls," he said. "It's situated nice."

Namath returned to Florida and came back to New York in the first week of June. He was scheduled to appear at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel for the football writers dinner on Tuesday night. He was to receive an award as the most valuable player in the American Football League.

Shortly before the dinner he met with Pete Rozelle and Phil Iselin and Weeb Ewbank. The subject matter was Bachelors III.

Rozelle told Namath that a continuing investigation had revealed that unsavory characters frequented the place. They were making bets from his telephones. Rozelle said the police were about to raid the restaurant. Rozelle asked Namath to get out of the restaurant business.

"When can we talk again?" asked Namath.

"Why don't you come to my office on Thursday?"

An appointment was made and Namath, in a tuxedo, walked through the lobby of the hotel to the main ballroom for the dinner. He smiled and waved at friends and took his place on the dais. Then the dinner began. Supreme Court Justice Byron (Whizzer) White was the main speaker and Namath listened patiently to his address. Then some football films were shown. One of the films showed Namath, in his glorious green Jets uniform, passing his team to victory in the Super Bowl. Finally, after much sitting, much drinking and much waiting, Namath was introduced.

"That sure was a pretty nice film," he said. "I really

enjoyed watching it, but to tell you the truth, I've seen better films in some of my friends' apartments."

Most everyone in the male audience of some five hundred people laughed at the allusion to stag films. So did Namath. So did Pete Rozelle. There was hardly a man in that room, clergy included, who had never told an off-color story. Namath was not arrested on the spot. In fact he was allowed to continue. He even told a dirty joke. Then he got serious, thanked everybody for the honors heaped on him and sat down. The evening was considered pleasant by everyone who attended. Two days later, after the Bachelors III explosion, Namath's conduct at the football writers dinner was considered distasteful.

On Friday morning, June 6, 1969, Namath appeared tired, drawn and extremely nervous. The quarterback, who had coolly set the football world on its ear, was not having that kind of a day in Bachelors III.

He announced his retirement, the word spread across the country, and the biggest running story in sports history began filling the sports pages. Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak in 1941 had excited as many people, but it had instant decision. He got a hit or he didn't. With Namath, the ramifications were enormous.

By early afternoon his teammates, coaches, friends, enemies and just about every Joe Blow in the street had an opinion on Namath, about Bachelors III and on the private life of a public person.

One of the major side benefits for Namath was the heavy amount of business at Bachelors III. Until that Friday it was just another New York bar. Kids hung out there perchance to see Namath, perchance to meet Linda Lovely. Now all the world was beating a path to Lexington Avenue.

"It's been pretty hectic," said Joe Dellapina, Namath's manager, on Saturday night. "I think we may have to hire Madison Square Garden for Joe's friends to drink in now."

Bachelors III was as crowded as a bar could be. Still, the cash register wasn't jingling as well as Namath and his friends would have hoped. Much of the crowd was

made up of reporters. No reporter buys. He drinks but he doesn't buy. Gawkers were jamming up the street and forcing their way through the doors.

"It was hard," said Dellapina, "to tell the cops from the customers."

By Monday night things seemed to be holding at a low boil. Joe Namath wasn't budging. Neither was Commissioner Rozelle. The good guys and the bad guys were all having their say. How would it be resolved?

Easy. Arthur Goldberg would solve it as he had solved so many other major American legal and labor tangles.

The radio was on in the men's room near the phones—the famous phones that Rozelle and his official investigators and the police had indicated were being used for illegal purposes—when a bulletin came over.

"Arthur Goldberg has agreed to mediate the Namath case," the announcer said, "if he is acceptable to both sides."

Arthur Goldberg, negotiator for the steel unions, Supreme Court Justice, ambassador to the United Nations, confidant of Presidents, said that he too was a football fan.

"I would like to see this matter resolved," said Goldberg, "and I have expressed to several parties my willingness to sit down, listen to both sides, and attempt to aid in the solution."

The picture was too beautiful for words. Joe Namath would be telling it to the Justice. Only it didn't come off. Goldberg's offer was left unaccepted and the former Supreme Court Judge would have to sit back like any other Jets fan and wait for the outcome.

While the world wondered and waited, Namath played golf. He flew to Nevada on Tuesday and shot a 79 in the eighth annual Harrah's Invitational golf tournament at Stateline, Nevada.

"I won't sell," he told the press, who badgered him for some new gems. "Why should I? What have I done wrong?"

That was the line of reasoning Namath used throughout the uproar. What had he done wrong? He reasoned that he was being punished for associations. He himself,

he claimed, had done nothing wrong. Was this a free country or wasn't it? Like all rules, Namath had his own interpretations of right and wrong.

Life Magazine was to put Namath through its meat grinder the following week. Weaker men would have been crunched. Namath was jolted, outraged and shocked, but he got up on his feet again.

In its June 20 issue, *Life* printed a gallery of pictures of characters the magazine said frequented Bachelors III for gambling purposes. *Life* identified them as Cosa Nostra staffers and thieves. This was no longer kid stuff. *Life* had taken the Namath case out of the hands of the sportswriters and put it into the hands of the police reporters.

In a long article about Joe's retirement, *Life* wrote, "Namath is, in short, too delicious to spit out, too indigestible to swallow, too noisy to shut up, and too firmly embedded in the minds of millions to vanish without caterwauling for a long, long time."

With such objective description of Namath, *Life* went on to print pictures of alleged Namath customers in Bachelors III. They included gang boss Carmine Tramunti, identified by *Life* as a man who "hoped to gain the image of respectability" by acquiring cafes; Carmine Persico, identified by *Life* as a triggerman in New York gang wars and a rising figure in Cosa Nostra; Thomas Mancuso, identified by *Life* as a gangster who passes commands; Harry (The Hawk) Bernow, identified by *Life* as a thief extraordinary; and Jojo Davidson, identified by *Life* as a fugitive bank robber.

Life said the police had tapped telephones in Bachelors III and found out "that a full squad of hoods was operating in Joe Namath's nightclub." *Life* said, "At one time or another all of them—like anyone else who came regularly to Bachelors III—got to know Namath or at least rubbed shoulders with him."

The *Life* story was a bombshell. Sympathetic sportswriters and friends of Namath now were a little more reluctant to defend him. The pressure was building for Namath to forget the grandstand play, sell the restaurant,

apologize like a good boy and go back to throwing footballs for a living.

A week later more ammunition was discharged. *Sports Illustrated Magazine*, a sister publication of *Life*, revealed inside information that Namath's apartment had been frequented by the Mafia for, of all things, crap games for big stakes. Names were named and amounts were listed. Even dates were given. *Sports Illustrated*, in a marvelous example of selective news judgment, had neglected a very simple fact in its story. While the dates for the games were printed, *Sports Illustrated* did not print the fact that at that moment, Joe Namath was in Vietnam talking football with a lot of kids who had their arms and legs blown off.

Time Magazine's coverage was extensive but less sensational. They had obviously been scooped by *Life* and *Sports Illustrated*. It might not have happened if Henry Luce was still around.

Namath wasn't moved by the revelation of the crap games in his apartment. He just said he wasn't there and that was all there was to it as far as he was concerned. His landlady didn't take it that easily.

"If there were any noisy games going on in any apartment in my building," she said, "I would have heard it. I hear everything. Nobody gets into the building without me knowing about it."

It was suggested by one friend of Namath's that he didn't need football, Bachelors III or any of his other lucrative investments.

"Joe will get rich just holding on to the key-making concession for his apartment. At this rate more guys in New York must have keys to Joe's apartment than their own," a Namath pal said. He could kid about it. He owned a key.

The Namath controversy continued to spread its wings into all aspects of American life. No less a journal than *The New York Times* decided the *vox populi* must be heard. It devoted a half of the sports page one day to a cross section of opinion on Namath.

Most of the people seemed to be in sympathy with Namath. One pretty girl, Barbara Courtlandt, a twenty-

four-year-old aspiring actress who was waiting to be discovered while working as a waitress, said, "He speaks honestly, something few people in public life do. There appears to be a tendency to persecute people who make it, whether it be Namath, Bobby Kennedy or Elizabeth Taylor. I admire courage. He is fighting back for a principle."

One man refused to comment when asked by the *New York Times* reporter to express an opinion. "Do you have any views on Namath, sir?"

"What do you think, I'm a girl?"

He obviously had a point. The female of the species did seem to be rising to the occasion in their almost unanimous defense of Namath. Males were a little more evenly divided.

The anti-Namath attitude was summed up by Sehij Hoshovsky, a twenty-one-year-old college student, who said, "He must not give the sports fan any feeling that he has any connection with suspicious characters."

This was the prevailing Establishment attitude. Pro football must be above suspicion, and Namath's connection, however remote, would undermine this clean image the fans had of the pro players. The sides were clearly drawn.

Namath continued to spend most of his time playing golf. He went to Seattle for a tournament, went back to Nevada for another, journeyed to Hollywood, where they accepted him with open arms to present an Emmy, and returned to New York early in July. As always, he was in Bachelors III. This time he had a hulking former FBI agent on his side, supposedly guarding the doors against undesirables. Most undesirables looked like newspaper men.

Finally, with training camp less than two weeks away, Namath and Commissioner Rozelle agreed to a meeting.

"We won't just discuss the restaurant," said Rozelle. "We'll discuss everything."

"I just want to find out what he has on his mind," said Namath.

Namath appeared for charity at a Monticello, New York, harness track and then motored back to the city

the next day for the confrontation with Rozelle. Not much was expected from it. Too many lawyers and newspaper men were around. Rozelle and Namath each indicated after it was over that nothing was resolved. Namath still had Bachelors III and Joe Namath still was an undesirable football player.

On July 5 Namath flew to Los Angeles to make his acting debut as a Marine in a movie called "Norwood" starring Glen Campbell. Before he could get on the set, the movie-makers managed to promote a huge press conference. Namath, dressed in a yellow sports shirt and blue bell-bottom trousers, flirted with a number of girls around the set and planted a big kiss for the sake of photographers on the cheek of Meredith McRae, who was playing his girlfriend in the movie.

"He's adorable," said Miss McRae. Namath had scored another one for his side.

Hal Wallis, the Hollywood producer, who was making the movie, took one look at Namath and said, "He may have some potential as an actor." Wallis didn't want to go too overboard, because Namath, like a lot of actors, would soon be out of work again. This wasn't the time to praise him too highly. That could be done after he had signed his contract. Namath told the press he thought movie making could be fun. He also said he had no further news on his football career.

"As far as I know," he said, "I'm still retired."

On June 12, Namath got his \$60,000 for making the movie (his part lasted six days from 10:30 until noon each day) and he flew back to New York.

Reporters met him at the airport but couldn't get any commitment from him as to what he would do about the Jets. The team had to report by midnight Sunday, July 13, for their first workout on Monday morning at Hofstra College in Hempstead, Long Island.

Late Sunday evening, weary Weeb Ewbank, who was growing old and tired just answering questions about Namath, said, "I don't know any more than I've told you. He isn't here, is he?"

Bill Hampton, the equipment man of the Jets, expected Namath. He had placed his uniform in his locker,

his white shoes cleanly polished, his game uniform hung on the side, his practice uniform with the red shirt that warns attackers that the wearer was a precious jewel not to be touched, ready for Namath's appearance. Several of the other New York Jets players, who were as much in doubt as Weeb, waited for word of Joe.

"We want him to play," said veteran Curly Johnson, "but we'd like to know where the hell he stands. He owes us that much."

The night wore on and finally the telephone rang in the Hofstra switchboard. "Joe Namath calling for Weeb Ewbank; yes, operator, right away . . . Joe Namath, Mr. Ewbank, yes sir. . . ."

Ewbank retreated to a private phone in his office. Namath relayed the good news to him. He wouldn't be in camp Monday but he did expect to report by Thursday or Friday of the first week. He told his coach and owner Phil Iselin that they needn't worry about him any longer. Namath did not say anything about Bachelors III. He did not say if he would sell or keep it. He did not say if he would confront Rozelle with the necessity of technically having to suspend him. As of now, it had been all Namath's doing. Rozelle had never suspended him. He had only made it clear that he would, if Namath didn't clear out of Bachelors III once and for all.

It was impossible to be sure. Would Namath report? Would he be suspended? Would his knees, after all, finally give out?

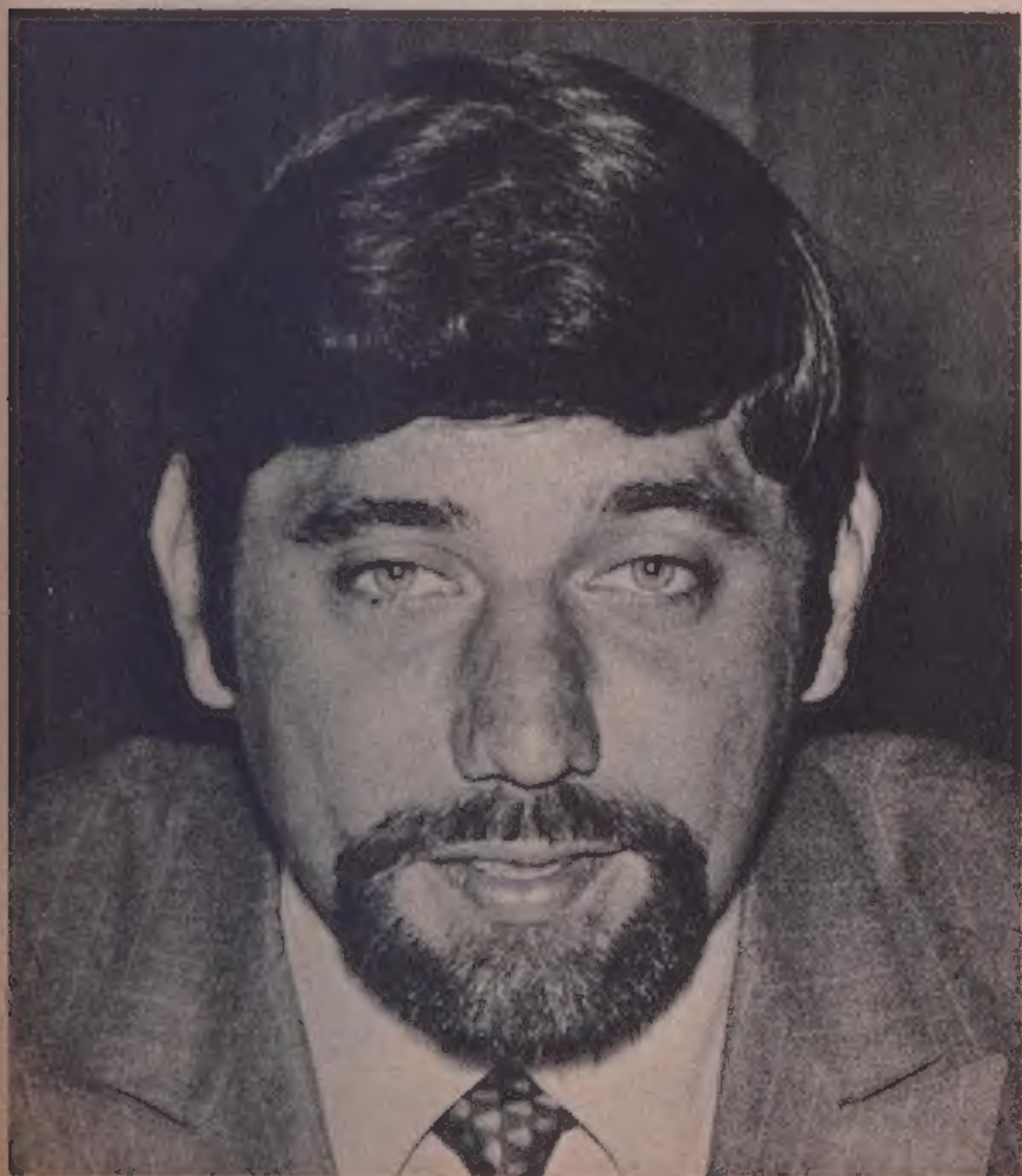
The drama lingered for a week. Finally, late Friday, a week after the Jets reported to their Hofstra camp, Namath agreed to sell his interest in Bachelors III and return to pro football with the Jets. Commissioner Pete Rozelle made the announcement at his Park Avenue office.

"We have had some unpleasantness for six weeks," Rozelle said, "but it has all been settled. Joe will play."

Namath said, "If I was the only one involved I wouldn't give in, but my family, my friends, my teammates, my associates and the public are all concerned."

One thing was certain. Namath would make out all right. He always had. The day might even come when he would be the biggest thing in movies and he would be doing the life of Clark Gable and he would be looking a beautiful blonde girl in the eye as the cameras were grinding for posterity and Namath would drawl, "Frankly, Scarlett, and you too, Pete Rozelle, and Weeb, and all you rule-makers and Establishment guys, I don't give a damn."

On Joe Namath's tombstone they may someday write: Bachelor I: He didn't give a damn.





Total concentration—part of his ability to analyze defense.

